

spare Rib

A WOMEN'S LIBERATION MAGAZINE
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A
mother's
illness, a
woman's death
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This year's National Women's Liberation Conference takes place in London on April 1–3. After last year's conference we wrote: "There was talk of . . . the need to re-state constantly and publicly the feminist content of the demands — so that we don't lose our energy and imagination in an effort to come over as respectable and get things done."

The problems are now if anything more acute with more organisations taking up women's issues, like abortion and equal pay, being careful to refer to them as Women's Rights rather than Women's Liberation. There was discussion of whether to omit the word 'liberation' from the poster publicising this year's conference — in case it put people off.

Of course we want the movement to grow but it seems to us that there are problems if we are to increase in strength as well as expand. We hope these will come up at this conference.

Why do we feel that the feminist content is being watered down? What is it that gets left out? . . . A political analysis based on the actual conditions of women's lives and how women experience them; the recognition that men have the real power in this society (economic, cultural, psychological and sexual) and that the Women's Liberation Movement aims to change this radically. We want to work for changes now, but many reforms (particularly legal) can actually maintain this unequal power relationship by papering over the cracks with token 'successes'.

The idea of sisterhood — of women getting together, sharing experiences and giving each other courage and inspiration — is very threatening to those who uphold the way things are. We are told that it's divisive, a 'red herring'. But by throwing ourselves into campaigns we can miss out on the chance to build from our own experiences, raise consciousness and strengthen our movement. (This is often a problem with single issue campaigns — when abortion for instance gets separated from the wider question of sexuality.)

All these are difficulties we face on *Spare Rib*: how to be popular, accessible and reach more women without toning down what we want to say and trying to be acceptable — something which, as women, we've been brought up to be good at!

"It's not a question of working inside or outside the system . . . it's a question of what we really want . . . of knowing what our true desires are and working wherever we are in whatever way we are able, to achieve the power over our lives that we need."

Kathie Sarachild,
Redstockings in "*Feminist Revolution*".

letters please send to Spare Rib 27 Clerkenwell Close London EC1

Sado-Masochism in Vogue ★

Dear Spare Rib,

Congratulations for 'Tooth and Nail', we really need to fight stereotyping in advertising and the media if we are to succeed in changing the self-image of women, and in drawing recognition of women's equality from all men.

I wonder if readers have noticed the disturbing trend towards physical abuse against women in recent advertising. This is developing particularly strongly in the US and has even provoked the formation of a new group, Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW). This week's (7th Feb) *Time* magazine devotes almost an entire double spread to a tongue-in-cheek article describing the trend. First it gives many examples of sadism in advertising such as a man in a dinner jacket caressing the hand of a nude woman who has just been strangled with a telephone cord, and "a vicious dog faces the camera with bared teeth directly in front of a woman's crotch". Perhaps the most offensive described is a boutique display of a dead woman, blood running from her mouth, tumbling out of a garbage can — men's shoes with the slogan "We'd kill for these" are placed on her head and neck.

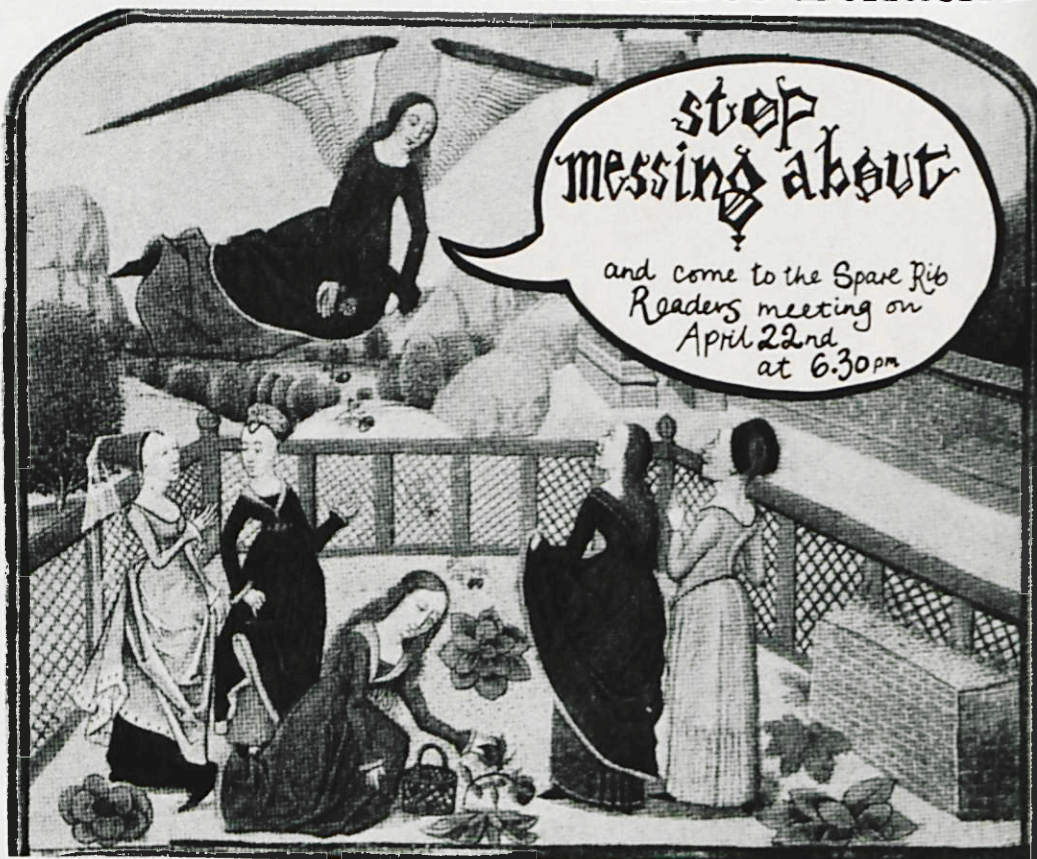
Time follows the descriptions with an obviously male analysis of why these adverts 'work'. Apparently half of American women have sexual fantasies of being forced to surrender to men who've overpowered them — the old 'they love to be raped' bit. And "strong

independent women often produce masochistic fantasies as a compensation for succeeding in a man's world", because, as we all know, successful women really want to be dominated!

The ads are displayed in women's magazines such as *Vogue*, as well as billboards, record-covers,

TV, etc. The final insult is hurled in the revelation that soon women are to be shown abusing men. Castration by vicious dogs? No way — "the woman might be slapping the guy or throwing a cocktail in his face". I don't particularly want to see women attacking men in an ad, but it makes me so angry to

see women abused in this medium so often. If we must have advertising, how about making it healthy instead of being based on the romantic or sadistic fantasies we're all supposed to be subject to. To the future, in sisterhood
Jackie Manchester



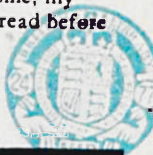
Yogurt Cures? ★

Dear folks,

Many thanks for the Thrush article, I'm still on the yogurt cures.

I asked my sixteen-year-old daughter to type it out for me and keep a copy for herself. The next three daughters will each get one in turn.

Enjoying the magazine, my husband usually has it read before I get to it,
Regards to all
Jean Aitken
Dumbarton



Dear Spare Rib,

One word of warning about your article on natural remedies for thrush. As soon as I felt that "slight itch", I started the yogurt treatment. After a few days the itch had spread and become so painful that I had to give up and go to a doctor for Nystatin. Meanwhile the Monilia had gained such a strong foothold that it was very difficult to get rid of. Perhaps your article should have stressed that the remedies don't work for all women.
Yours sincerely
Libby Curran
London SW9

Dear Spare Rib,

We found much cause for concern in your article on Thrush (*Spare Rib* 54), not the least of which involved your irresponsibility in publishing an item with such disturbing implications, both medical and social.

Firstly the symptoms mentioned could indicate not only thrush but also some other venereal disease; surely in such cases self-diagnosis is not advisable. With reference to cervical mucus we are told: "when it's clear a woman is fertile, when it goes cloudy she's not". This statement is irresponsibly ambiguous.

At exactly whom is the article directed anyway. A working woman with children must find the quickest way of curing herself and it is therefore almost inevitable that she will have to go to a doctor and obtain antibiotics. For such women it is impractical not to wear tights, just as it is impractical for them not to buy convenience foods which obviously contain chemical additives. The diet suggested would be expensive and time consuming to prepare if one were already feeding a family. Nor can a married woman with children be told to "change your life situation before it changes you".

As for the cures mentioned, are we supposed to try one after the other or use them all in conjunction? Nor are the cures "natural" as the writer claims: yogurt, vinegar douches and fungicides all introduce chemicals into the body.

Finally the actual wording and style of the article was simplified to the point of being insulting — how many women can relate to the idea of their vaginas as ponds containing "a great number of different plants and animals all living together in perfect harmony".

We are not all ladies of leisure with the time and money to mollycoddle ourselves back to health, we certainly do not have the time to undergo acupuncture, fill our vaginas with yogurt every few hours, take vinegar baths, douch and do "relaxing exercises". If there are such ladies they certainly would not be reading *Spare Rib*.
Yours sincerely
Girton Feminist Reading Group
Cambridge

The article on Thrush wasn't meant to create a polarisation between self help methods and the National Health Service. It was providing information on how our bodies

work and on alternative treatments so that we can either try home cures or approach our doctors with the knowledge and confidence to get the treatment we want.

The language of the article is part of an attempt to find ways, other than using medical terminology, to explain our physiology. To answer your questions: yogurt was suggested as the primary method; the other cures were if yogurt failed to do the trick. Yogurt and vinegar were called "natural" because they contribute to the body's innate methods of resisting infection, whereas Nystatin introduces fungicides not manufactured by the body. The reference to cervical mucus should have been expanded: the mucus becomes cloudy as soon as ovulation has taken place, due to the increase of progesterone in the blood, impeding sperm. Before ovulation, when the amount of oestrogen in the blood increases, the mucus becomes copious and clear, making the sperm more active and mobile.

Though not all women either can or want to take up alternative cures and carry out preventive measures, surely the knowledge shouldn't be kept from them.

...letters

Official Concern not Enough ★

Dear Sisters,
In issue 55 you printed a news item from us concerning the government's response to the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage.

What we didn't say clearly enough is that legal changes and sympathy from local authorities don't stop women being battered.

Admittedly we haven't much opportunity to gauge how effective the Domestic Violence Act is since the date for its enforcement — originally April 1st — is being pushed back further and further.

But anyway, it's not enough. What we are fighting against is the assumption that battering is an individual problem. The struggle has only just begun and what we want is a real change in attitudes and women's position in society. In sisterhood
National Women's Aid Federation
51 Chalcot Rd
London NW1

Prostitutes Organise

Dear Spare Rib,
I am amazed that you should finally publish something so critical of the feminist movement. I refer to the article about Birmingham prostitutes and their resentment towards the movement.

I couldn't agree with their sentiments more. The feminist movement has used the prostitution issue semantically by way of defining women's position in a sexist society. Meanwhile thousands of real live women are at the very real live mercy of laws which are so sexist that even the Catholic Church is embarrassed by them.

Feminists are using their prostitute sisters to further their own philosophical arguments in much the same way as the police are using prostitutes to get easy promotion in the force.

Should feminists not first fight the law which dares to define some women as prostitutes and punish them as such, before it decides whether or not being paid for sex is destructive towards the progress of liberation?

Shame on all feminist ponces
Helen Buckingham
London NW3

Jobs for the Girls

Dear Spare Rib,
Paula Jennings and Maureen Watson obviously misunderstood the Job Creation Scheme which is administered through the Manpower Services Commission. The employer in the case they mention is the Glasgow Women's Liberation group.

There are plenty of areas to campaign on without picking on something we can turn to our advantage. Why should men pay us to liberate ourselves — because they can't stop us!
Yours comradesly
Rosemary May

The Conspiracy of Merlyn Rees ★

Dear Spare Rib,
I am sure that the anger and disgust I felt on reading of the treatment Zahira Galiara received at the hands of Heathrow Immigration officers (SR 55), was shared by other Spare Rib readers.

Yet it appears, from the complacency with which the Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, has recently announced his intention to continue and extend the 'authority' of police and Home Office officials to violate the privacy and security of immigration women, that the Government is either unaware of or determined to ignore our views on this matter. In this conspiracy it has, as usual, the active aid of the national press which reports the Home Secretary's statements with approval and presents the issue not as a matter of human rights, but as a problem of "illegal entry" through "marriages of convenience".

I suggest that we combat this distortion of public opinion by flooding the press, the Home Secretary, Shirley Summerskill, and our own MPs with letters and petitions stating our views. I should be pleased to hear of further moves against policies and tactics which, if we do not speak out, the British government will continue to direct, in our name, against our sisters. Yours in sisterhood
Margot Sinha
Brighton

Women only growth

Dear Spare Rib,
I'm writing in response to Sheila Miller (SR 56) as someone who's been to, helped organise, and played for "women only" events. I'm surprised that she feels these events are "against the spirit of the movement". Who is the movement for? There are innumerable places where women can be with men if they wish. Until recently there's been nowhere which is women's space.

Events solely for women are many things; they are part of an emerging women's culture previously denied to us, just beginning to be reclaimed and explored. They can be celebratory, re-energising situations for women already involved in feminism, in the sense of having a good time as well as re-affirming our anger and purpose. Hopefully, they are encouraging for women who have not enjoyed being with women before, as a crucial part of discovering and exploring our strengths and abilities together. In this context, they are not a rash, but a growth; though they have a long way to go in developing away from the models provided by a sexist patriarchal society.

We all know the radical difference men's presence makes to a situation. We aren't "going out of our way to alienate", the alienation existed before we got together. Clearing a space for ourselves is difficult; it is a right, not just as an alternative which is an end in

itself, but as part of our developing struggle — not for "equality", but of a (hopefully) revolutionary feminist movement.

While sympathising with Sheila's friend who wasn't informed beforehand that she wouldn't be able to be accompanied to an event by her male friends, I can't help feeling that if the men in question supposedly have the consciousness to write feminist songs, I would presume they would have no trouble in understanding women who wish to be autonomous in organising politically, culturally, emotionally, sexually and socially.

In sisterhood
Frankie Green

Party-lining

Dear Spare Rib,
Teresa Savage's letter about the lesbian personal ads typified for me the blinkered attitude of the totally politically motivated lesbian.

You cannot reduce everything to an ideological norm; saying in so many words that this is the 'party-line' and lesbians who see their relationships differently must be brought into line with it.

I agree that role stereotyping of relationships is something that we should be moving away from but this view does not give anyone the right to tell others how to live.

Never mind questioning the 'femmes' self-image; I think Teresa Savage should question her own high and mighty attitude to the girl, and others like her, who she is condemning.

Best wishes
Hilary Stafford
Annesley Woodhouse
Notts

Male Mafia's Loosing Battle ★

Dear Sisters,
As a feminist/trade unionist, I would like to comment on Penny's quote (Chapelton Playgroup, SR 53) regarding her diffidence concerning attendance at NUPE Branch meetings.

I find it sad, although perhaps inevitable that she should have such preconceptions about trade union meetings; however I can assure her that as a member of a Union which has a preponderance of low skill and/or low status members, 80% of whom are women, she need not consider herself inferior. Most NUPE members, who have hitherto been accustomed to being 'only' childminders, cooks, nurses, care attendants, social workers, cleaners, etc., etc., are now beginning to challenge their own and society's assumptions about themselves and in so doing have taught — and learned — many salutary lessons.

Problems on the Road

Dear Spare Rib,
We have just finished producing "On the Road in Leicester", just in time for copy date. When we decided we'd like to do the page we felt it was really good that Spare Rib wanted to become less London-centred, and to find out what is going on elsewhere by actually going round the country to see for themselves. But the visit fell through due to a misunderstanding so we were left to prepare the page ourselves, with some guidelines of what SR wanted from us.

We wonder what the point is of doing the "On the Road" page in this way. SR will probably sell more copies in Leicester this month; the Leicester women's group will get a lot of publicity; but the contact between SR and the local group — which we understood to be the main point of the page — has been non-existent. We realise that there are always problems of overwork and lack of time, but feel this contact should be a priority and that we would rather have held the Leicester page over for a month, than do it in this way.

In sisterhood
Leicester Women's Liberation group

Yes, we agree and we're sorry. It's hard to get around, but until this issue we'd always managed somehow. We've decided in future to do the regional page less often so we can do it better.

The point of the page wasn't just for us to make direct contact with women round the country, but also for readers to find out what local groups are doing — and the Leicester page does get that across.

Of course, no organisation containing a 'male mafia' (or for that matter, female supporters thereof) can be ideally suited to the feminist ideology, but the struggle against such elements (in whatever organisation) can only serve to educate — and therefore strengthen — the women's movement.

Love and strength,
'Anon' — Trade Unionist
Glamorgan

★ indicates letters have been cut

Lance the night away with Spare Rib and Jam Today at Ladbroke House on MARCH 25 from 8PM on next hop is on APRIL 29

26^{Monday}

January

27^{Tuesday}

28^{Wednesday}

29^{Thursday}

1912 Lawrence, Mass. Annie Lopizzo shot on the picket lines during one of the most famous strikes in American labour history, following an attempt to cut wages in the textile mills. Among the IWW leaders was the 21 year old Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. 'When Elizabeth spoke the excitement of the strikers became a visible thing. She stood up there, young with her Irish blue eyes, her face magnolia white, and her cloud of black hair, the very picture of a youthful revolutionary girl leader . . . It was as though a spurt of flame had gone through the audience, something stirring and powerful, a feeling which has made the liberation of people possible.' (Mary Heaton Vorse). Margaret Sanger, pioneer birth controller, organised for the strikers' children to stay with sympathisers in New York for the duration, 63 days. The children and foster parents were often beaten up at New York stations. The strikers won, and inspired James Oppenheimer's song *Bread and Roses*.

KATE HEPBURN (COURTESY PLUTO PRESS)

Friday

January

Saturday **31**

As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day.
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray.
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses
For the people hear us sing: "Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"

As we come marching, we battle too for men.
For they are women's children, and we mother them again.
Our lives shall not be sweetened from birth until life closes.
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead,
Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.
Small art and love beauty their drudging spirits knew.
Yes, it is bread we fight for—but we fight for roses, too.

As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.
No more the drudge and idler—ten that toil where one reposes,
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!

Sunday **1**

February





ALISON FELL

LEICESTER



In early 1976 Leicester women were very active in "action groups" such as Women's Aid and NAC, but there was no specifically feminist group as such. Then a sister strongly criticised the nature of the groups at a monthly discussion meeting. Her outburst stimulated new thoughts and discussion, which led to the formation of consciousness raising groups, and weekly meetings at people's houses, where we could get to know each other. We wanted to build on these feelings and started a monthly newsletter to provide a forum for discussion and communication between groups and individual sisters. We meet as a collective on the Saturday following our monthly discussion and spend the day writing and producing the newsletter which has a circulation of about 80.

Since last summer we have had a market stall and a jumble sale — to raise money, and more importantly, for publicity. We plan to give talks about women's liberation in local schools and to other women's organisations. We have also joined with other groups to campaign against racism and sexism; we are affiliated to the Leicester Anti-Fascist Committee and will join with them to fight the National Front in the local election in May. Several sisters went to, and really enjoyed, the Birmingham regional conference in October. We made links for the first time with other women's groups in the region and are now working with Nottingham to organise the next regional conference here in Leicester.

University Women's Group

After a somewhat precarious start to this session the university women's group has steadily blossomed: women of diverse leftist opinions realised, after a discussion on "Women and Sexism", that there is a universal basis to our oppression and a need for a strong women's organisation. Apart from having weekly discussion, we campaign actively against sexism in the university, picket sexist events and agitate at Union Council for the implementation of policies on such issues as abortion and nursery facilities. We also work closely with the town women's group in all campaigns.

Women's Centre

We would really like to have a women's centre in Leicester but a search for a suitable house has so far been unsuccessful — any offers? Meanwhile we use a room in a house shared by some sisters in the group. Contact: 19 Chandos Street.

Free Pregnancy Testing and Contraceptive Advice Group

We provide a free pregnancy testing and contraceptive advice service with sessions twice a week: Saturday 10–12am and Wednesday 6–9pm at 35 Keythorpe St, Highfields, Leicester; appointments are not necessary. We aim to prove that there is a need for this service but we need more women to help with testing and publicity if we are to be effective. If you would like to help contact Moira at the above address or Sally at 19 Chandos St.

Leicester National Abortion Campaign

In Leicester women are denied NHS abortions because of local gynaecologists' attitudes. We have produced a pamphlet, *Abortion in Leicester Now*, collected signatures for a petition about abortion facilities, leafleted the town and picketed the Infirmary. Now we hope to campaign for an outpatient abortion clinic in Leicester and against the threat to abortion rights contained in the Benyon Bill. Contact Moira at 35 Keythorpe St. or phone Mo 823789 for details of meetings.

Leicester Women's Aid

Leicester's first refuge opened in December 1974 and there are now two, both full most of the time. The group is affiliated to the National Women's Aid Federation and operates a national open door policy. The women's group has recently become more involved in the women's aid support group and we hope to contribute more in the future, especially with publicity and education. Contact Cherie, tel: 707631; refuge, tel: 540431.

Lesbian Group

In October 1976 lesbians in the women's group started a group to discuss issues relevant to us as lesbians and feminists, to stimulate discussion and action on sexual politics in the women's group and to join with other gay groups on issues concerning all homosexuals. Many groups and individuals picketed the *Leicester Mercury*, Leicester's evening paper, which refuses to advertise 'Gayline', a confidential telephone counselling service, or to take any advertisement which includes the word 'homosexual'. Contact Ruth, 65 Knighton Drive, tel: 700164.

Leicester Women's Street Theatre

The group began 18 months ago as an offshoot of a local Women's Theatre Festival. We have received a grant from the City Council but consider ourselves an independent group of women who have come together to present local and national issues from a woman's perspective. We write and produce our own shows: a short mime about battered women; *The Equalities Show* — written and sung around the 10 points of the Working Women's Charter; *The Alice Show* — about the images presented to adolescent girls today; and *The Hapless Homeless Band*. We have performed in the parks and streets of Leicester; at late night theatre; at women's conferences; in schools and Women's Institutes, where we try and spark off some lively discussion. Contact Trish, 65 Knighton Drive, tel: 700164.

Hinckley Women's Group

The group was formed in Hinckley, 15 miles south west of Leicester, in early December. So far we have 10–15 active members. We hold fortnightly discussion meetings and one consciousness raising group. We work closely with the Leicester women's group and support NAC activities both locally and nationally. We have social events such as theatre and concerts. We are speaking to other groups and already have invitations from two Women's Institutes to speak. Much of our effort is directed towards publicising the group's existence and aims. Contact Marie, 35 Dares Walk, Hinckley.

Useful Contacts

- Community Relations Council, 58 Earl Howe St. 58338
- Citizen's Advice Bureau, Bishop St Library. 536581
- Housing Advice Centre, 13 Wilne St. 27410
- Family Planning Association, St Peter's Health Centre, Sparkenhoe St. 25162
- V.D. Clinic, Royal Infirmary. 541414
- British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) nearest branches are Birmingham and Coventry. Phone 021-643 1461 to make an appointment at either place.
- Gingerbread — group for one parent families, c/o Highfields Community Centre, Melbourne Road, Leicester.
- Gayline phone 826299, 7.30–10.30pm every day.
- Advice on Welfare Rights Claimants, Union, c/o Wesley Hall, Hartington Rd, and Braunstone Advice Centre, 95 Hand Ave. 856402
- Working Women's Charter Group, contact Gerry, 20 St James Rd. 538074
- Marxist Education Centre, including Women's Struggle and Marx Group. Contact Rachael, 112 Laurel Road.

There will be no *On The Road* next month. If you want your town included please contact us.

in search of a nursery

Free full-time daycare facilities are necessary both for the children who play there and for their mothers who otherwise are isolated at home, unable to go out to work or to study; even a trip to the shops can be an ordeal, coping with heavy bags, wriggling toddlers and a hostile crowd. How can women with young children be independent if there are no alternatives to staying at home alone with them? Legislation for sex equality means little if childcare is left entirely to the individual woman. Here Many Blatchford, a single mother originally from Iran, now living in Lambeth, South London, tells of her struggle to get a nursery place for her son. Befuddled by the bureaucracies, she lost the place she had and went to the bottom of the list. And in Lambeth there are over 400 children on the 'priority one' waiting list alone.

It was October when I came back from a holiday at home to start my course at college. I was staying temporarily at a friend's house in Brixton, where I had a room with no electricity — not unusual, as electricity is a luxury for a squatting family. After resting for a few hours and putting my 20-month-old son Niaz to bed, I started reading the letters sent to me during my absence — some ordinary and unimportant letters from the library and college, *Hostelling News*, and letters from a Nursery Officer with Lambeth Social Services.

Her first letter told me that my son's place in the Cresset Day Nursery was due to be reviewed. If I needed the place during the next term I should write to them with proof from my college of the subject I was studying, the length of terms and my would-be career. What nonsense — I had told them several times already, I thought, while opening the second letter. This was very short, saying that as they hadn't heard from me, Niaz had been discharged from the nursery. "Oh God no." I said it quietly and sat down to think. I had told the matron that I would certainly need the place when I came back. When questioned I had emphasised that I would be going back to college the following term as I hadn't finished studying yet, and I had shown her the registration paper.

I needed to put Niaz in a nursery if I was to carry on studying. This was vital to me as I needed basic qualifications to enable me to get a job and be independent.

I went to Niaz's health visitor. She said we were no longer in her area, because we'd moved, though we were still in the same area as far as the nursery was concerned. So we went to another health visitor nearer our new house. When I explained everything to her, she said she was sorry but I must go to Lambeth

Social Services — only they could help me.

I went there, rang the bell and was shown to the waiting room. I waited for a long time, exhausted by Niaz's efforts to escape and my growing impatience. At last a lady came into the room, asked my name and address, and I told her my problem. She dashed off, returning quickly with a new application. She said she was sorry but I had lost the place and would have to reapply. I took the form and staggered home.

The next day I thought I'd better make an appointment directly with the nursery officer and explain everything to her. I phoned in the morning and went that afternoon. After a long wait a small middle-aged woman called me and we went into a cubicle together. I was worried as I had left Niaz at home alone. Although he was asleep I felt uneasy. She started questioning.

"How long will you be studying for? What will you be doing after you have finished college? Which college are you going to? What's its address? Its telephone number? How long are you going to the college every day? How many days a week?"

I answered her questions patiently and politely, mentioning that I had answered them all many times before. But when she started carrying on about my would-be career I grew impatient and told her that I had left my boy alone at home and couldn't stay there any longer, that I needed the place urgently. They had discharged him on the assumption that I didn't need the place any more. Now that I am here again and need the place badly, isn't it their responsibility to put him back?

"You have left your child alone at home? Oh you *shouldn't*, you know, it's against the law," she said, looking like a fox. "You have lost his place at

the Cresset Day Nursery," she went on, "the place is now taken by someone else and there isn't another available."

"It is only in the afternoons," I said. "Surely it is not impossible."

"There are many people on the waiting list, a great many people, and all have been waiting a long time," she finished. "Sorry, you must wait, we can't do anything."

"It's against the law"

I walked home confused, questioning myself and getting nowhere, with a picture in my mind of her fox face repeating the cunning words "you shouldn't have left him alone you know, it is against the law". I ran the rest of the way, rushing into the room to find him awake, crying his eyes out.

I stayed at home a few days thinking over and again what I could do. I couldn't go back to college while he had no nursery. He was too young to take to college with me and the weather was too cold anyway to do the journey with such a small child. And there were no facilities at college either. I thought I must try to see whomever I could, go wherever I had to and probably someone, somewhere should be able to tell me what to do.

One morning I phoned a local social worker whom I used to know and asked if we could see her, explaining why. I was given an appointment for a few days later. She listened carefully as a good social worker always does and let me do all the talking. Then I asked what she could do. She said it was difficult but she would contact Social Services and let me know the result.

When I took Niaz to the children's clinic I saw his new health visitor. I remembered how the other one had found the nursery place herself, how



helpful and understanding she had been. I found this one cool and indifferent. I told her politely that I thought she could show me an alternative and tell me what to do; she said that was not her job and she didn't know much about it.

For nearly two months my life had been paralysed and I had missed a term. I was unable to concentrate and do any reading at home either. The next term would start in January and I really wanted to go. It was not just not going to college that made me feel so frustrated, but sitting at home feeling idle and undecided and not knowing what to do next. Besides, it made me feel bitter, angry and cruel, and Niaz was the one who was being hurt most. Now I was hitting him nearly all the time and it seemed everything he did was wrong.

At night when everywhere was silence, between tiredness and depression I would visualise single mothers with more children than me and dread the difficulties they have to face. Now I could see why a perfectly normal human being would turn into a cruel beast. I could feel it inside me when I hit Niaz. I could understand why a mother batters or kills her child and why people take up guns and fight the state and the politicians, all those so-called innocents. I was beginning to sympathise with them and secretly envy their courage.

One night a friend called Charlie was going round the squatted houses encouraging people to come to a street meeting. I went with him and talked to other women with young children about arranging a play group. I thought we could start it from our house and take our turn baby minding. Some showed interest, so I asked them to come round to talk it over.

Most of those I approached were single parents with more than one child, bound to the children and housework, on the social security and squatting. The playgroup didn't come off, I think because most of them had so many problems in their own lives that a nursery place would be a luxury. They didn't expect to be able to be independent and go out to work. To them I was an ambitious person. They didn't know what existed outside their rooms, and I didn't know how to put it across. Most of all they had housing problems, and were much more concerned to have a roof over their heads than to have a nursery place.

"A kind of charity?"

By now there was little hope. I knew someone at the local law centre, so as a last resort I got in touch with him. But that too came to nothing.

That night I sat in bed and tried to read to take my mind off the problems and deadends I had come to. I couldn't concentrate, my thoughts wandered back over the last few months, remembering the number of people I had met and all the talks I'd had with them, all the phone calls and what a terribly frustrating time I had with my boy. I started asking myself *why*? Was it all because I couldn't get



Many Blatchford

a nursery place? Why couldn't I? It seemed so simple and straightforward. *I needed a place in a nursery for my son.* Wasn't that sufficient reason? Why couldn't I get it? *Do we have a right to a nursery, a playgroup and a house? Or is it a kind of charity that "the underprivileged" must beg for?*

I sat there and gazed at the wall and couldn't help thinking there was much more to it. It wasn't just negligence from the authorities or economic shortcomings. What about all these voluntary or government organisations, around 160 of them like Social Services, Housing Advice Centres, Consumer Advice Centres, Shelter, Law Centres and all the rest — what is their *real* function? Anyone who thinks that women should be free and independent can see the need for nurseries. I can't believe for a minute that our male-dominated state is blind to this fact — they choose to ignore it.

It isn't just that we can't get a nursery or a house or decent public transport — the whole system's wrong. I am poor so this is my status: I haven't a house, a job, a nursery place. Where money dominates, under capitalism, poor people, oppressed women, underprivileged children have no right to anything.

Charlie and I go round encouraging people to come to street meetings. There's someone's roof coming down, someone's electricity cut off, someone has no water — the work is divided and each is set to do something. Great, but *so what?* It would be no use if I *were* to have a nursery place or a house, or if you were lucky enough to have one too, or if my friend had one as well, because there are so many people in so many places who can't get their basic human rights and don't know it either.

The next day I took Niaz out for a walk and then we went to a Chinese bookshop. I bought a few children's books for him and read him a story on the way home. We had a nice time and both enjoyed and learned from it. My son is not yet five years old; he didn't understand the story but he listened to it, and this is only the start. We came home and ate something. While he was playing around I was pleased that he looked so cheerful and happy. I told myself that day that "We have a long battle before us and not just for a nursery place." □

The situation in Lambeth...

There are 24,000 under-fives in Lambeth, according to a 1974 GLC survey. Of these:
901 attend day nurseries (council and private);
1850 attend about 80 playgroups;
1450 attend nursery school or class part-time;
900 are looked after by registered child-minders (though only 12 childminders are employed by the council).
This leaves nearly 20,000 Lambeth under-fives with no provision at all! With the cuts this just gets worse, as the council phases out sponsored places in private day nurseries, trains fewer nursery nurses and stops all building.

...and nationally

In 1944, when women were needed for war work, there were 72,000 full-time nursery places in Britain. Now there are only about 24,000 (i.e. 7½ places per 1000 under-fives), and these are reserved for 'cases' classified as 'priority' — where the mother is ill, for instance, or battering the child.

As the government is now trying to maintain current spending, it has not yet closed many existing nurseries. But it is concentrating on cutting back *future* spending by not opening new nurseries already built and scrapping plans to build more.

Meanwhile voluntary groups get together to try to straddle the gap left by meagre state provision — of course councils cash in on this, seeing self-help projects as a cheap solution, but they do at least offer some solution now for women with small children.

What can we do about it?

As well as local campaigns round particular nurseries, there are several organisations pressing for nurseries provided and paid for by the government:
— the London Nursery Campaign, 26 Lovelace House, Haggerston Road, London E8 (01-359 0343);
— the Working Women's Charter Campaign, contact your local group via Jill Daniels (Sec.), 16 Crookham Road, London SW6;
— the National Union of Students Nursery Campaign, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 (01-387 1277);
— some trade unions, especially the National Union of Public Employees, many of whose members work as nursery nurses, etc. — they're developing a radical policy on daycare and contributed to the Labour Party Under-Fives Working Party which is soon to produce a report. The TUC too has a working party at least looking into the problem — they need to be persuaded that daycare should be a basic right for everyone who wants it, not just for those classified as "in need".



From *Amateur Photography* February 1977. Sent in by J Morris, New Barnet, Herts.

CURL UP IN BED WITH THE BRONTË SISTERS TONIGHT.

MOWERAYS BOOKSHOP

28 Margaret Street, Oxford Circus.
Tel: 01-580 2802.

From the *Evening Standard*

TO WHOM? ENGAGING

It is estimated that more than 150,000 girls in Britain will become engaged during the Christmas festivities.

From *Southampton Evening Echo*.
Sent in by Cathy Carter, Biltonne, Southampton.

"Lastly, note that all plurals which do not refer to rational beings are grammatically feminine singular."

From *Modern Literary Arabic* for 'O' level.
Sent in by Jane de Mendelssohn, London NW5.

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From *Manchester and Salford University's Rag Rag*. Sent in by Carolyn Minkes, Manchester 20.



Tooth & Nail

PLEASE KEEP SENDING
SEXIST CUTTINGS,
PHOTOS, QUOTES AND
ADVERTISEMENTS TO
"TOOTH AND NAIL",
INCLUDING ALL DETAILS
WHICH MAY BE NEEDED
BY PEOPLE WANTING
TO FIGHT BACK.

WHO TO ATTACK ABOUT
SEXIST ADS:

the manufacturers of the product
advertised and/or the agency
who make up the ad.

WHO TO COMPLAIN TO:

The Independent Broadcasting
Authority, for ITV ads and
programmes, 70 Brompton Road,
London SW9.

The Advertising Standards
Authority, though notoriously
unresponsive to complaints
about sexism, 15 Ridgmount
Street, London WC1.

WHO TO WORK WITH:

AFFIRM (Alliance For Fair
Images and Representation in
Media). A group acting against
sexism and offensive stereotyping,
can be contacted at 35
Colehorne Road, London SW10.

Madam Boss!



MICHELLE SCERRI is only three, but she's already telling people what to do.

Her 13-year-old sister knows Michelle's word goes, especially when "big" sister has a slipper in hand to smack anyone who disobeys.

When told she was too little to do the washing up after meals, Michelle solved the problem of reaching the sink by pulling up a chair, and showing them all!

Michelle, who is learning ballet, loves to dress up and was all swooniness and innocence as a bridesmaid at her aunt's wedding last week.

She waxes off being scolded by saying: "I'm no baby, you know." The family has run out of reprimands for her bossy little ways.

For when Michelle knows Mum is angry with her, she runs up and says: "I love you mummy." Now isn't she a right little madam? asks Mrs Scerri of Ferrier Estate, Kidbrooke.

● If you have a little girl who is also a proper little madam, write and tell us about her, sending a black & white photograph, of course.

"The accumulated discontents of the British political economy demand a new style response by the organizations of Labour. Such a response will ask a working man or woman.... what a man's life is for."

Ken Coates and Tony Topham in *The New Unionism*.

"Faced with rising prices, the working class and their wives have shown no inclination to demand the abolition of commodity production..."

Proletarian (Journal of the Communist Organisation of the British Isles) Issue no.2.

Sent in by L.D. Bronstein, London NW6.

With the dishevelled image goes wild, uncombed hair and a general air of naked sexuality—a carefully prepared celluloid image of "after the rape was over."

From *Evening Standard* fashion pages.
Sent in by B. Ellis, London SW2.

A competition from the *South East London Mercury*.
Sent in by Margaret Brook, London SE3.

'... I had no choice. I have been stuck with those things, others worse, why? Because of a man who took it upon himself to throw our lives into the gutter. And I was carted off to hospital and now my daughter spends her time with a ... grotty grovelling snob. Miserable, wretched lot of yobs. Likely to fall pregnant at seventeen, she is now.' A scream from **Doctors Talking to Patients** (£2.45). This book speaks - often painfully - for itself. Not so much a dithering hypothesis as a hard and realistic look at what doctors have to hear in the privacy of their surgeries. Verdict: not for the squeamish. You could call it insight reading.

There can't be many people who are told that a local council intends buying an approved school for them. It happened to Audrey Campbell, Director of Isle of Wight Social Services Department. There is a full account of it - and a lot more - in **Approved School to Community Home** (£1.25). Anybody who has tried to cope with young people suffering from anti-civilisation blues will know the importance of transmitting creative optimism. This is a blueprint for a delicate process.

We have stopped treating old people as troublesome objects to be fed and washed. At least, most of us have. **A Lifestyle for the Elderly** should be pushed under the nose of anybody who still thinks that residential homes for old people are run for the convenience of the staff. Some unusual questions pop up. Why is there such a lack of middleclass residents in these places? How do you prepare for death - an event as important as birth? How do you avoid being irritated by deafness, blindness, mental confusion? It's all here, based on a Coventry Social Services Department seminar. It costs £1.15.

The cost of bottom-of-the-barrel humanity. Mr N, aged 50, bruised by war, is in the grip of chronic alcoholism plus a nettlesome bevy of psychiatric problems. Referred to a social worker in 1972, eventually attended a day centre. 250 social work hours cost £370 plus hospital and GP fees at £33.90. Can you relate cost-effectiveness to helping people? The answer may be in residential care coupled with community support. Or maybe one client should care for another. Now that cutbacks are biting harder, **Decisions and Resources** (£3.50) has to be read - and used.

Published by HMSO and available from HMSO Bookshops and Agents who are prominently listed in Yellow Pages.

 **HMSO BOOKS**



**It's easy to know
your rights, getting
them is the problem**

The law demands sexual equality in employment.

Unfortunately employers can still frustrate the law's intentions. Equal pay comparisons can be disguised by reclassifying or regrading jobs. Equal opportunity can be blocked by introducing qualifications which few women can meet.

How do you challenge these tactics? Alone you could face legal complications, financial commitments and the consequences of failure. The real answer is union membership.

ASTMS was signing equal pay and opportunity agreements long before the idea had any legal backing. It had a remarkable record of success then; with the added support of legislation it can do even better.

Already 70,000 women realise ASTMS membership can bring success that their own unaided efforts can never achieve. You and your colleagues need both the resources and expertise of ASTMS.

astms

The Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (for further information write to Dept. M, 10/26a Jamestown Rd., Camden Town, London NW1 7DT. 01-267 4422, or telephone your local ASTMS office. You should find the number in your telephone directory).

NEWS

Anti-Abortion Bill Gains Ground

William Benyon, Tory MP for Buckingham, won a victory for the anti-abortionists on February 25 when his sneaky misogynist Bill got through its second reading. It now goes on to committee stage and will become law if it passes its third reading. This time 170 MPs voted for and 132 against, despite all the effort put into opposing it. Mandy Moore reports:

The Bill, though not published until a week before the debate (the 'first reading' simply means that the title is published), is very much as expected. It seeks to put an upper limit of 20 weeks on abortion as opposed to the present 28 weeks. Two doctors would have to give permission for each abortion, one of them would have to have been registered for at least five years and neither could be connected financially with the clinic giving the abortion. This hits the charities like BPAS and PAS who fill the yawning gaps in the NHS abortion service, and could be construed to mean that consultants and doctors paid by the NHS couldn't carry out abortions in the hospitals that paid them! The Bill requires that the woman's GP be informed if she's referred for an abortion. It strengthens the case for 'conscientious objection' by doctors and nurses who are

personally unwilling to perform abortions, without making it easier for a woman to find alternative abortion facilities if her own doctor objects.

It requires all referral agencies, pregnancy testing centres, etc., to be licensed and allows the police the right to inspect and take copies of registers and other books kept by clinics they're investigating — an incursion into the privacy of a patient unheard of elsewhere in the medical service.

It also states that abortion

shall include 'acts done with the intent to terminate pregnancy' — this could include fitting and use of IUDs, D&C operations and menstrual extraction.

"Angry and Distressed"

A massive campaign was launched against this Bill. A group of Benyon's constituents met him on February 18 to express their concern at his promotion of such proposals; he inferred that he wasn't interested in his constituents

and that his Bill was more important, as it dealt with matters of life and death.

A protest march in Bletchley the next day gained wide support. One constituent said, "We're angry and distressed by Benyon's proposals and hope he realises that the small majority by which he was last elected is very likely to disappear altogether under this provocation." On the morning of the second reading the Hackney group of the National Abortion Campaign picketed outside his London home.

Several delegations went to see David Ennals, Secretary of State for Social Services, about the Bill, including a group of Labour women MPs and representatives of women in the Labour Party in general.

David Steel MP, who proposed the 1967 Act which liberalised existing abortion law, asked about the government's position on 'abuses' of that Act and on February



PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINE WEBB AT THE ABORTION RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

"The Committee heard evidence of one case where an abortion was sought for no other reason than that the girl who sought it felt that her wedding dress would be too tight. There was another instance of a mother who wanted her child to start a cookery class and therefore wished her to have an abortion so that she could do so.

"I myself know of a case where a girl sought an abortion simply because she wanted to play in the local tennis club tournament."

— Jill Knight MP, SPUC supporter, actually churned that out in the abortion debate.

NEWS

10 Ennals replied: "There is a case for a period of calm to assess the impact of changes before considering further legislation. Little purpose will be served by introducing a complex amending Bill which may cause confusion and uncertainty for the many doctors and health professionals (*no mention of amateur women* ...) who believe that the present Act is for the most part achieving the intentions

+MARCH AGAINST THE BENYON BILL MAY 14+

of Parliament in providing a responsible and civilised service for women in need. Nevertheless MPs will naturally be free to vote according to their consciences."

Though this comes out against Benyon's Bill — and Ennals personally voted against it — it shows once again the Labour Government's reluctance to face the issue of abortion, although abortion on request is official Party policy. Afraid to take a stand for a woman's right to choose, they hide behind the consciences of individual MPs.

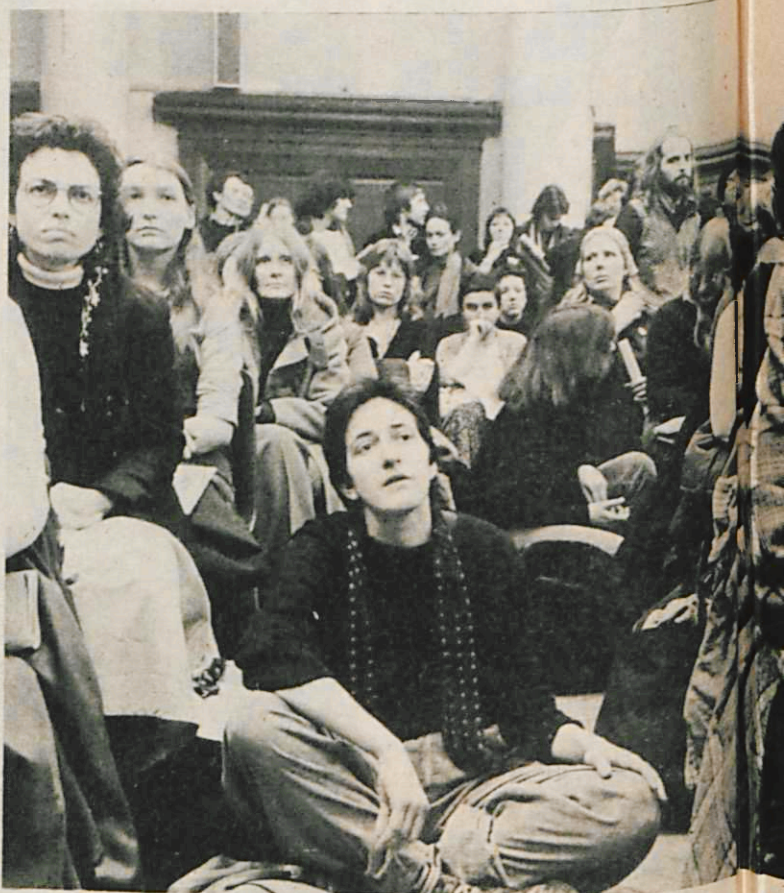
MPs were certainly inundated with information before the debate. As well as copies of Ennals' statement, they received the BPAS publication *Abortion Today*, a wealth of clearly laid-out facts and figures on abortion statistics and opinion polls. All Labour MPs also received a briefing sheet from the National Labour Women's Advisory Committee stating the policy

of the TUC, Labour Party, etc., and a meeting organised by the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign (LARC) in the House of Commons provided them with the opportunity to consult experts in a number of fields, all opposed to the Benyon Bill.

On February 24 the National Abortion Campaign held a torch-lit march supported by about 2000 people and a packed meeting in Central Hall, Westminster, with speakers from Benyon's constituency, LARC and from local NAC groups. The Abortion Law Reform Association outlined their proposals for positive legislation which would enable "any qualified person to terminate or procure the termination of a pregnancy at the request of the woman whose pregnancy is to be terminated".

The day after NAC's march and meeting, the Socialist Workers Party (otherwise known as IS) very brightly organised exactly the same events on their own.

A lot of activity then, but seemingly to little effect. Many MPs either don't think the issue is worth bothering about and so don't attend the debates, or bow to pressure from anti-abortion organisations like SPUC, Life and the Catholic Church. It was clear from the debate that most don't read the literature we send and don't know what they're talking about. Is it confusion or plain dishonesty that makes Elaine Kellet-Bowman for instance so convinced that doctors are forcing women to have



JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)

Central Hall, Westminster, the day before the second reading

abortions rather than trying to put them off? Asked what she'd do if her daughter wanted an abortion she said, "The least I would ask is that if she did decide in favour of an abortion the decision would be hers and would not be in any way influenced by a pregnancy advisory service or a doctor." And she is one of the sponsors of this Bill designed to deny women any right to choose!

The Bill now joins the queue waiting to reach standing committee (this is a stage that all bills go through; it's not the same as a Select Committee, a special committee set up to investigate a whole issue and put forward recommendations). In standing committee a bill can be changed within the scope of its title, and as this one's called The Amendment of the 1967 Act almost anything is possible; they may well

Doctors down on home births

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE: A young woman wants to have her first baby, due in April, at home. Why should that be a news story?

Well, Miranda Ward and her husband Dave told their doctor about this some time ago. He seemed to agree, but asked them to see a consultant at the nearby Newcastle General Hospital. She did this when she was six months pregnant. The consultant tried in vain to change Miranda's mind, and when she returned to her GP, he had before him a letter from the consultant, and told Miranda that she couldn't stay on his panel if she insisted on a home birth.

So at seven months preg-

nant, Miranda was left without medical cover. However, after the story had been publicised in the local and national press, the Newcastle Area Health Authority promised midwife cover for a home confinement — as indeed it is their duty to do — but Miranda, Dave (a former male nurse who is now a student) and their friends feel that this cover has not been supportive.

Margaret Wright of the local branch of the Home Confinement Society (which has its headquarters in neighbouring Durham county, where up to 10% of babies are born at home) believes that many women, like Miranda, find that the pressure to go against their own wishes and receive treatment they don't want causes physical and mental symptoms of stress. She thinks the

medical definition of normality in pregnancy is too rigorous, and that many doctors are on principle opposed to home births. □ Anna Briggs

Forced sterilisation-official

A 23-year-old woman was sterilised without her knowledge or consent when she went into hospital for an abortion. She was told about it three years later, when she married and went to her GP hoping she was pregnant.

Her father signed the consent form because the consultant decided the woman was unfit to choose, claiming she had epilepsy and a 'personality disorder' —

though she was working full-time in a shop and hardly under-age. She protested, but an operation to reverse the sterilisation failed.

The Health Commissioner has officially criticised the consultant, for relying on the father's consent without even fully explaining the issue to him, and the health authority for failing to investigate "this grave complaint". □

Coil with a hormone

A new coil has been developed, Progestasert. It's made of plastic and T-shaped — the hollow stem of the T contains crystals of progesterone, a hormone usually secreted after ovulation in the menstrual cycle. The stem is made of a



try to change the grounds for abortion too.

Sympathetic Labour women MPs feel the best way to delay the Bill is to try to get on the committee, which is chosen to be proportionate to the vote in the House, and propose amendments to be discussed at length. The chances are that it will come up again for a final vote, so we need to pester our MPs and start thinking about what to do if this Bill does become law. □

special membrane through which progesterone is released at a regular daily rate.

The hormone doesn't make the coil any more reliable — it's less safe than the pill and possibly slightly less than some other coils — but it does get rid of its commonest side-effects, heavy bleeding and painful periods. It's thought that it does this by stopping the lining of the womb building up. The idea is to make the coil more pleasant to use.

Tested at Kings College Hospital, London, it has to be renewed once a year, though a three year version is being worked on. And there's a big problem at the moment — they cost £17 each, so they're not generally available on the NHS, only from certain doctors privately, and from some hospitals and clinics. □

SELLING BARLEY IN BANGLADESH- who's to blame for its abuse?

Babies are dying in Bangladesh because they are being fed on nothing but a teaspoonful of Robinson's barley flour mixed with water a day. Their mothers mistakenly believe that this is all they need. The inadequate and confusing information given on the tins of flour, together with misleading adverts, recommends barley for healthy infants without stressing the crucial need to mix it with milk and sugar.

The widespread misuse of barley flour in Bangladesh is a result of commercial exploitation of a product really suitable for adults with fever or diarrhoea, or as a simple refreshment, in an underdeveloped country where many children die young. Mothers, desperate for the health of their children, seize anything that seems to offer more chance of life, and their poverty and misunderstanding is used to market a product they don't even need.

Babies fed on barley flour and water get carbohydrate but only 0.4 grams of protein a day (14.5 calories). A six-month-old child needs at least two grams of high quality protein per kilo per day — so for instance a child weighing six kilos will need at least 12 grams of protein. Barley water alone is totally inadequate, yet it is being promoted as suitable.

This was reported by Martin Schweiger, a Voluntary Service Overseas doctor working in Bangladesh, whose dispensary in Saidpur treats many malnourished children every week. He noticed that one group differed from the rest. These had a history of being fed on barley water, and had a distinctive facial expression — "a mixture of apathy and sadness". They had also been fed from bottles which were usually "improved or septic containers".

There are thousands of malnourished children in Bangladesh; it is estimated that at least 10% of moderately to severely malnourished children die before they're five. Of 397 such children that Schweiger's dispensary saw in one month, 90 were "barley water babies", and 30 of these died. "Barley water babies" accounted for about a third of all badly nourished children seen, and were mainly aged between six months and three years.

Barley flour is a fine white powder packed in distinctive

red and blue tins. It's been widely marketed in India and Bangladesh for about 50 years by Robinson's (now owned by Reckitt and Coleman). They have promoted it in a way that suggests it's a baby food, with pictures of healthy babies. Medical staff may recommend it if mothers have stopped breastfeeding because of bad health, or if their children have diarrhoea or scabies, but they fail to explain the correct method of preparation. Over many years women have taken in the propaganda and feed their children on this empty substitute.

On the tin are detailed instructions about mixing the powder with milk and sugar and adding to boiling milk, and different concentrations and amounts are recommended for each age. But these are in tiny print, confusingly laid out, and written in English instead of the local language, Bengali. Dr William Cutting of the Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said that on a tin of barley he had from India "the print was so small you'd need a magnifying glass to read it".

When Schweiger and other staff questioned the mothers of "barley water babies" about the instructions, they found that "none understood them, very few had taken the trouble to find out what was written and most believed that the powder was a complete infant food". A few had added sugar but none had used milk.

Compared to other more nutritious alternatives, such as a mixture of rice and lentils (and of course breast milk if this is still possible), barley flour is expensive, but families will make the financial sacrifice believing barley to be better. Following the instructions and adding milk and sugar would make it very expensive, as these aren't cheap or easily available. The marketing of barley in this form becomes even more exploitative when you realise that the same ingredients are commonly available in Bangladesh at a fraction of the price of a tin of Robinson's.

The way multinationals operate in Third World countries has been exposed before — they create markets wherever and by whatever means possible, and the consequences can kill. In 1974 Nestles was accused of killing babies in the Third World by persuading mothers to buy powdered milk instead of breastfeeding. They were capitalising on beliefs that such products from the advanced Western world were best. Powdered milk, like barley flour, is expensive, less nutritious (especially as it's often watered down) and generally used in unsterilised conditions (see SR 34).

রবিনসন্স পেটেন্ট বার্লি

শিশুকে পুষ্টি দিতে
আপনার শিশুকে
সুস্থ রাখতে
এই বার্লি
আপনার শিশুকে
সুস্থ রাখতে
আপনার শিশুকে
সুস্থ রাখতে

এতে খরচও কম।

রবিনসন্স বার্লি
শিশুর খাদ্য
কোম্পানীর পণ্য

আমাদের ডান থেকে
১ পাউণ্ড বার্লি কিনুন,
একটা SICAL মার্কা
চরের ঢাক
বিনামূল্যে পাবেন।

Leaflet promoting barley flour for babies — though the writing here is in Bengali, the instructions on the tin are in English, useless to most mothers.

SUPPLIED BY VSO

WORK NEWS

Last year VSO complained to Robinson's about the labels on the tins, and new ones appeared in January. But Schweiger is very dissatisfied with these too, saying they're still too complex for uneducated mothers and don't adequately stress the need to add milk and sugar.

Gillian Neeve at VSO said that Robinson's were beginning to make the right noises and are sending someone over to see what is happening. They're willing to take Martin Schweiger on as a consultant, and Dr Cutting is hoping to send a research student to Bangladesh this year to assess the "barley water babies" situation.

Robinson's market an estimated *one or two million* tins of barley flour every year in Bangladesh. It's very widely used — Schweiger notes that tins can be found in small villages miles from the main road or nearest town. If the example of 30 children dying during a one month investigation at one dispensary is multiplied over the rest of the country, the implications are horrifying.

While mothers desperately try to do the best for their children and understandably misuse barley flour, Reckitt and Coleman see the situation in terms of "a lack of communication with people who cannot read"! For them of course, the root of the "problem" lies in the women's ignorance rather than their product's promotion. □

Sue Sharpe

USA: Crime against who?

Status offences are acts which are crimes only if committed by minors, such as running away. The ageist discrimination of these laws is only surpassed by the sexist ways they are enforced. In Montgomery County, Ohio, for example, 75% of the girls sent by juvenile courts to Ohio youth commission facilities were status offenders, mostly runaways, while only 25% of the boys committed were in that category.

The *Dayton Daily News* quotes Bob Light of the Montgomery Youth Bureau: "It's okay for boys to run away because Huck Finn and Woody Guthrie ran away, but for girls to run away, our society draws the line there." □
from off our backs

RALLYING ROUND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Women's Rights Rally, staged in Alexandra Palace, London, on February 26 was sponsored by the Working Women's Charter Campaign and some trade unions. It was definitely not a eulogy to the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act, passed almost exactly a year before the rally.

It was, rather, a critical assessment of the Acts, a public voicing of some women's experiences under them, and a gathering together of many political groups and factions under one very gracious roof, with the aim of drawing strength for the future.

A collection of speakers, from Betty Tebbs, active within the trade union movement since the 1930s, to representa-

tives from the Grunwick Strike Committee (APEX), made interesting listening in the main part of the vast hall throughout the day. Some disheartening but realistic points were made by Ann Holmes, prospective Labour candidate for N. Kensington: three quarters of the female workforce still earn 80p or less an hour; less than one third of the cases taken to industrial tribunals under the EPA in 1976 won; only one fifth of cases taken to tribunals under the SDA in 1976 won.

Carole Amies, a teacher, was one of the speakers whose own experience with tribunals corroborated the poor figures.

"I applied for the job as Head of the Art Department at the boys' school where I've

been teaching for five years," she said. The SDA came into force on 29 December 1975. Carole maintained that in order to evade it, ILEA and many other employers brought forward interviews to before that date. "This was the case with mine, previously scheduled for February 1976," she said. She didn't get the job even though her qualifications were better than those of her (male) junior in the department, who did. She is still fighting

Drifting round the stalls



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

Protecting women

Under the Sex Discrimination Act, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has the duty to review the laws restricting women's employment and advise the Home Secretary on changes needed. The Commission should complete the report in 1978.

The Factories Act which "prevents women and young people doing shiftwork and excessive overtime — except under an exemption . . ." is at the centre of the discussion.

Why shouldn't women make their own decision, like men, about what is good for them and use collective bargaining to get what they want? This argument assumes that workers can make a real choice between overtime earnings and leisure. A TUC report (1975) showed that the amount of overtime worked was highest among low paid workers and that it diminished as hourly earnings rose.

The National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) have produced a report containing the evidence they gave to the EOC. They argue that protective laws are necessary

because women are still the "worst paid and least organised section of the working class" and would feel pressure to work long, unsocial hours to get adequate wages. Additionally childcare and housework are not at present equally shared between the sexes — many women have two jobs. If they worked longer hours their health would suffer.

The CBI are in favour of abolishing protective legislation. It is important that Acts on equal pay and sex discrimination are not used to lower work conditions but to raise them. Some protective legislation should be extended to cover men and expanded to protect workers in jobs that necessitate night work, like hospitals, by stipulating longer holidays, etc.

Do these restrictions prevent women getting skilled training? In continuous process industries (paper, steel, glass) women are excluded from apprenticeships because shift/night work is a pre-requisite. The question here is not equal opportunity to get exploited, but equal job opportunity. NCCL supports a "limited relaxation" of the laws in this area but only after consultation between the EOC and the trade unions. □

Barbara Charles
Protective laws, Evidence to the EOC by Tess Gill, NCCL report no. 17; 30p plus postage from NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1X 9DE.

EDINBURGH industrial tribunal has decided that the Royal Scottish Academy discriminated unlawfully against Judy Dunlop on grounds of sex by not allowing her to work night shifts as a security guard, resulting in a loss of earnings.

WARWICKS: An assembly worker at Automotive Products has won his battle to stop women at the factory leaving five minutes before the men. The Employment Appeals Tribunal decided the practice did go against the Sex Discrimination Act. □

NEWS

GRUNWICK'S SEEKS SUPPORT

Jayaben Desai from Grunwick's Film Processing in North London spoke at the Rally of their six month strike for union recognition. The workers, mainly Asian women, are protesting against long hours, low pay and humiliating conditions.

"We know other workers with the same problems are watching us; we can't give up for their sakes. But it's time for other unions and the TUC — which has promised us all kinds of support — to come in and help us win."

On February 9, after 16 weeks investigation, ACAS, the government's arbitration service, recommended that Grunwick recognise the union, APEX. But management refuses to be bound by the report, even threatening to sue ACAS!□

ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)



Jayaben Desai

overall, though men in the same job wear jeans, open-necked shirts and no overalls.

At the hearing, the manager admitted he was "old fashioned" in considering women to be "more ladylike" in skirts. David Austick, co-owner of the family firm and a Liberal MP, declined to comment.

Responses to our placards and leaflets, headed "Who Wears the Trousers?", were nearly all in Marianne's favour. Some were amazed that the issue should arise at all in 1977, others stopped to tell us about other restrictions imposed on girls' and women's clothes. Few city centre stores give shop assistants choice, as we found when we took leaflets in.

Adverse reactions took two forms: some older people felt the boss's word was law — "Girls should do as they're told" The other response, heard only from groups and accompanied by guffaws, was on the lines of "Skirts Rule OK — We like to see their legs". Guess which sex *that* came from.□ Al Garthwaite

What's up at Electrolux?

The Equal Opportunities Commission has launched its first formal investigation in the field of employment into what it calls "the situation at Electrolux".

In 1975 Electrolux in Luton (part of a Swedish fridge and Hoover manufacturing multinational) failed to make its 1900 production workers (600 of them women) accept an "equal pay" proposal — they wanted to up most women's pay and lower the men's. So the men went on strike for a month, with the women's support. It was settled that July when the women accepted a *separate* agreement which they thought at the time would be to their advantage.

So when the Act came into effect, the factory still had a grading system based on sex discrimination, with all the women in grade 01 and all men plus a couple of women in grade 10. No man is ever recruited to grade 01. There's a great difference in pay between the two grades — in department ten (sub-assembly work) the average difference

the decision, after losing her case, and intends to take it to national and European levels.

Stalls selling books, magazines and leaflets fringed the floor. The audience of about 1400 was mainly under 35, female and, I judged, converted to the women's movement and the left.

Val Graham, a local teacher said early on that she had recognised quite a few activists there and wondered if the rally's publicity had been directed towards drawing fresh faces. There were some coaches from further afield though, and Jill Daniels, Working Women's Charter Campaign Secretary, said she'd received letters from all over from people interested in attending.□

Alison Campbell



Dough rises Skirts Rule

A threatened national bread strike over an equal pay claim affecting 6,000 women workers was called off at the last minute when employers gave in to the Bakers' Union's demands.

The union wanted £5.69 more for women producing "morning goods", such as bread rolls. As this meant up-grading, the big bread firms suggested the men go down a grade instead and take a cut in wages.□

LEEDS: On February 21 a group of women handed out leaflets in the shopping centre during the lunch hour about our right to choose what we wear to work.

This was to coincide with Marianne Schmidt's appearance at Leeds industrial tribunal. She had lost her job as shop assistant in Austick's bookshop after refusing to comply with a "no trousers for women" rule in force there. She was also expected to wear an

BOYCOTT ELECTROLUX PRODUCTS



until women workers there get
equal pay and equal opportunity

Flyers available from the Electrolux Boycott Campaign, Wanstead
Woodford Women's Liberation Group, 9 Northumberland Ave, London E12
(01-530 2949).

is £12 a week.

Women who wanted equal pay were told they could apply for a transfer to grade 10, but that this would mean loss of their long-service records. Since in case of redundancies Electrolux has a policy of last-in first-out, this threat stopped women applying for grade 10 jobs. One woman who did apply had to do some of the dirtiest and heaviest jobs in the factory during her four-month training period, jobs which men trainees needn't do. Lack of support from Sjogrem, district official of the AUEW, delayed the struggle. Although in 1975 he promised full

support to any woman who went to industrial tribunal, he argued all along that women shouldn't use the law but rely on the trade union tradition of collective bargaining. Yet he did no useful bargaining for the women.

When seven women from department ten applied for equal pay in January 1976, he refused to help. Shop steward Anne Hutchinson and six other women still won their cases at the Bedford tribunal, which gave a big morale boost to the other women. During last year 227 of them filed equal pay claims!

Their cases haven't yet been heard because the tribunal awaited the result of the appeal, where Electrolux failed to prove a "material difference" between the men's

and women's jobs.

The judge, Mr Justice Phillips, said that by making decisions in individual cases the courts couldn't create a fair wage structure — this should be done by negotiation; he suggested the EOC help if unions and management couldn't do it. The tribunal then waited again.

Individual or Job?

As soon as the firm's appeal was rejected, the seven women who'd won equal pay were moved from the jobs they'd taken to the tribunal to other jobs in the same department. Those who took over their jobs were still paid the lower 01 rate.

These women were selected by the others because they represented most of the jobs done in the department. So their victory meant that most women in the department should get equal pay!

But Electrolux disputed this and persuaded the women to keep quiet for six weeks while the EOC made an inquiry, apparently hoping to use the EOC to divert the women's militancy. Eight weeks later, on February 14,

after a two-day visit to the factory, the EOC announced its formal investigation.

Management then started making moves to implement a new pay structure. A new nine-grade pay scale was rumoured, with most of the women in the lower three grades.

So the 62 women in department ten went on strike on February 21, demanding equal pay for all jobs represented. Women in other departments stopped work on the 22nd, threatening to strike in sympathy. On the 23rd the company gave in and department ten went back to work. Those whose jobs went to court are now on equal pay.

But 540 other women workers there want to know what will happen to them. All their jobs should be subject to regrading, but how? Will the EOC issue its first non-discrimination notice which the company has to obey? Can they do more than that? And how can the union save face after all the bad publicity it's had? □

Elisabeth Ghariel

Wildt Wives Support Sit-in

"We get the benefits from the good times, and we should support our men when the going gets difficult," says Lynn Anderson of the Wildt Wives Support Group. She's a nurse, and married to the convenor at Leicester's Aylestone Road factory of the Wildt Mellor Bromley firm.

The factory, which makes machinery for textile manufacture, was occupied by the mainly male workforce on February 14 in opposition to the planned closure. Closure would mean redundancy for about half the 800 workforce, with others moved to another of the firm's Leicester factories.

"Most of the men would never get a similar job in Leicester, with things as they are now," says Lynn. Thinking about how to support the occupation, Lynn Anderson and Christine Billington came up with the idea of calling a meeting of the wives and forming a Wives Support Group. Men were staying in all round the clock and non-workers weren't allowed inside.

"We knew the wives would be hit hard and we wanted to give them, as well as the men, moral support. Forty women

turned up at our first meeting — we were overwhelmed — a lot more couldn't come but have been keeping in touch.

"One of the reasons we started the group was to stop women nagging their husbands and breaking their morale." (But that seems to accept the media caricature of women as nagging and trivial.)

The group is made up of wives, some of the men's girlfriends and mothers. About half the women themselves go out to work. They also get support from the few women workers on the shopfloor and some of the female office workers.

The women have organised raffles, coffee mornings and other events to raise money. They've worked out a baby-sitting rota so that wives can visit their husbands in the factory occupation. Christine's house is being used as an

office and centre, where wives and children can drop in for a cup of tea and a chat.

In protest at their treatment from the local media, the Support Group has picketed the offices of the local evening paper. Letters hostile to them have been printed, but none from their supporters. The local radio station has specifically requested phone calls from any wives hostile to the occupation.

With little previous interest in their husbands' jobs and trade union matters, the women are suspicious of outside groups, such as the Trades Council Women's subcommittee, trying to influence them. Many threatened to leave when it was suggested it be renamed "Wives and Trade Unionists Support Group".

For most, it's the first time they've been able to talk to their husbands about the factory, work and trade unions. What was previously, mainly, their husbands' world — a world apart — they now feel part of. I was told that some of the male workers resented this "intrusion", and the Support Group feels it has to tread carefully so as not to antagonise.

The Wildt Wives Support Group approach poses many questions for the women's movement, as well as for trade

unions and left groups. How do feminists relate to not specifically feminist groups, in particular to women with little experience of working together with women — how can we learn from each other? How do feminists work with women who don't question the fact that their lives revolve around men and see their activity as mainly in relation to men? — in this case, supporting their husbands, though through doing so they gain solidarity as women.

In a town not renowned for its militancy in the post-war period, a "Cowley wives" situation in opposition to the occupation could have arisen. The exclusion of wives and children from the male work situation and discussions would seem to be common.

In such a tradition, the attitudes and aims of the Wives Support Group are perhaps the most anyone can hope for. Unless women are consciously included and involved in struggle, they can be hostile and a force for demoralisation.

Wildt wives have shown that this need not be the case. □ Rachel Wilson

The occupation ended on March 1 after the management had taken out a possession order, but the workers have organised a 24 hour picket.

Married woman's option to change.....

The 'married woman's option' in national insurance is being phased out. Ruth Lister of the Legal and Financial Independence Campaign explains what the changes are and how they may affect you.

The married woman's option is an example of the way married women's second class status in the social security system is disguised as a privilege. Under the option, married women and widows can choose to pay reduced national insurance contributions, which means that they are not eligible for national insurance benefits. Only about a quarter of employed married women opt to pay full contributions.

But from April 5 the married woman's option will be gradually phased out. Any woman (other than a widow) who marries after that date will have to pay full contributions when she's in paid employment. If you're already married, and till now have paid reduced contributions, you can continue to do so, as long as you let the DHSS know by May 11; you can do this by filling in the form at the back of leaflet NI1, available from DHSS offices.

Once you have chosen the reduced rate you can stick to it unless you divorce or drop out of employment for two whole consecutive tax years. (You can of course change to full rate if you want to.)

For widows the situation is slightly more complicated. If you're already widowed, you too must record your option before May 11. But if you're widowed between 5 April 1977 and 6 April 1978, you'll still have the chance to opt for reduced contributions. If you're widowed after 6 April 1978, you'll be able to pay reduced contributions only if, when your husband dies, you have *already* opted for reduced rate as a married woman.

To make an informed choice about whether to pay full or reduced contributions, women need to know what it *means* in terms of the contributions they have to pay and the benefits they'll receive. As usual, DHSS leaflets aren't over helpful, so I'll explain briefly what you need to take into account:

Contributions: If you earn £15 or over, you have to pay contributions equal to 5.75% of your weekly earnings (6.5% from April 1978); if you opt for reduced rate your contributions are 2% of earnings. If you are self-employed you pay £2.55 a

week, or nothing if you opt for reduced rate (though you will have to pay class 4 contributions if you make profits of £1750 or more).

Benefits: The most important question is how will it affect your *retirement pension*.

Till now it hasn't been worth most married women paying full contributions as they can usually get a higher pension based on their husband's contributions than their own. But a new pensions scheme starts next year, giving women a better chance of earning a decent pension in their own right. This is because:

- 1) With the new scheme, on top of the basic pension, you'll be able to get an extra earnings-related component based on your twenty best years of earnings (though it'll be 1998 before anyone gets the full benefit of this). You can get this only on the basis of your *own* earnings.
- 2) In future, married women are much more likely to be able to satisfy the contribution conditions for a full basic pension. (The basic pension you can get on your own contributions is now £15.30 compared to £9.20 on your husband's contributions, though this goes up to £15.30 if he dies.) One reason for this is that the vicious *half test rule* will be abolished in April 1979.

According to this rule, to qualify for any pension in her own right, a married woman, married before the age of 55, must satisfy the contribution conditions for at least half the years between the date of her marriage and reaching pensionable age. If she doesn't satisfy this test, any contributions she has paid are totally wasted. Many women have been disqualified from receiving a pension under this rule.

New Category: "Responsibilities at Home" But more important is that the

new pensions scheme recognises that many married women are unable to build up the contribution record necessary to qualify for a full pension because of the time spent caring for children. As from next April, any time taken off because of "responsibilities at home" will not effect your pension rights, provided you have paid (or been credited with) contributions for at least 20 years during your working life. If you have less than 20 years' contributions, your pension will be reduced proportionately.

The regulations defining 'home responsibilities' haven't yet been published, but we know they'll include staying at home to care for children (school-age as well as pre-school) or for relatives in receipt of invalidity or retirement pension or attendance allowance, and cover part-time workers earning less than the lower earnings limit (now £15). They'll cover *single* fathers but maybe not married men.

How can you get most pension?

You need to work out whether you're likely to be able to earn a higher pension than you'd get on your husband's contribution record. This will depend on how many contributions you've already paid and how many you're likely to pay between now and when you retire. On the whole it won't be worth while for older women to start paying full contributions now, because it's only the time spent at home as from next April that counts.

You can ask your local social security office to check your past contributions record for you. You should also find out whether your husband has a full contribution record. Finally, take into account the fact that you can't get a pension on your husband's contributions until he reaches 65 and retires (or if he carries on working, reaches 70). So if you retire at 60 and your husband is the same age or younger than you, you'll have to wait at least five years — unless he's at least five years older than you, you won't get it at once.

Effect on Short-Term Benefits

Whether or not you pay full contributions also affects short-term benefits such as unemployment/sickness benefit and maternity allowance. Whether you pay full contributions in the tax year

April 1977-78 affects your entitlement to these benefits in 1979. So if you're thinking of having a baby between 25 March 1979 and 22 March 1980, it's worth paying full contributions now!

At present a married woman who claims sickness or unemployment benefit gets a lower rate of benefit for herself than a man or single woman, unless her husband is deemed incapable of self-support. This particular piece of discrimination ends in April 1978, but married women will *still* get less for their contributions than other contributors because they will still be unable to claim extra for their children and husband, unless their husband is incapable of self-support "by reasons of physical or mental infirmity and is likely to remain so incapable for a prolonged period".

SOCIAL SECURITY



So the money married women get won't be enough to support their family and they still won't be able to claim supplementary benefit — their husbands would have to claim as 'breadwinner'. Unemployment benefit runs out after a year, and as a married woman can't claim supplementary benefit, she's left with nothing.

However, under a draft EEC directive, women should, eventually, receive equal treatment with regard to these dependency allowances and other social security benefits. And as more and more married women become full contributors to the national insurance scheme, pressure on the government to repeal these discriminatory laws will hopefully increase. □

..... WHY NOT PASS THIS ON TO A FRIEND

Talks-Conferences

The Changing Role Of Women And Its Implications For Their Psychotherapy
March 23. At the Society Of Analytical Psychology, 30 Devonshire Place, London W1. Speaker: Jean Miller. Details (01-486 2321).

Censorship
March 24. 7pm at the Institute Of Contemporary Arts, Nash House, The Mall, London SW1 (01-930 6393). 'Problems facing publishers' is the first in a series of weekly talks on censorship.

Sexual Division Of Labour In Agricultural Norfolk & Northumberland
March 25. 7.30pm at the Women's Research And Resources Centre, 158 North Gower St, London NW1. Speaker: Eve Hostettler. Feminist History Group talk. All women welcome.

Science
March 26. 10am conference at

Sussex University, Brighton. "The aim is to discuss not only women in science, but also the ways in which science/technology oppress women." Register in advance with Lynda Birke, 15 Camelford St, Brighton (0273-682475). Food, creche and accommodation provided.

Women & Therapy
March 27. 2.30pm at Essex Rd Women's Centre, 108 Essex Rd, London N1. Women involved in various kinds of therapy will talk about what they are doing.

National Women's Liberation Conference
April 1-3. At City University, St John St (Angel tube), London EC1. A weekend when women can exchange news, ideas and skills. There will also be women's theatre, films, live music, books, posters, crafts, food as well as discussions on various topics. Register as soon as possible as the money is badly needed. £2.50 or £1.50 for claimants, to National Women's Liberation Conference, c/o A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham St, London WC2

or c/o 23 Wavenden Ave, London W4. For accommodation and creche contact Joan Curtis c/o Essex Rd Women's Centre, as above.

Power & The Curriculum
April 1-3. Conference at Durham. One of the themes is "Sex roles - the loaded curriculum": stereotyping of sex-roles in textbooks on work; sex education materials and the presentation of homosexuality. Contributions to Judy Keiner, Bulmershe College Of Higher Education, Earley, Reading, Berks (0734-663387). Details from The Association For The Study Of The Curriculum, c/o Terry Brown, University of Durham, 48 Old Elvet, Durham.

Representation In Industrial Tribunals
April 6 and May 12. Courses at Friends House, Euston Rd, London NW1. Organised by the National Council For Civil Liberties. Details from Ann Sedley, NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1 (01-278 4575).

Short

Sexual Self Determination And The Right To Control Our Own Bodies

April 24. At Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19. Second in a series of regional workshops, exploring the relationship between socialism and feminism. Details from the planning group, c/o 13 Malfort Rd, London SE5.

Teaching Girls To Be Women
April 30. 10am-4pm. First in a series of day conferences sponsored by Essex County Council, at Essex University. Speakers and workshop discussions covering historical background, sex roles in the classroom, curricular choice and the transition from school to work. Programme and registration forms from The Liaison Officer, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex (0206-44144 x 2375)

Fun

Women's Monthly Event
Is now without a home. The event collective are searching for a place where up to 300 women can come together to talk, dance, eat, drink, and share music, poetry, theatre. Contact them at (01-790 1501) or 184 Lansdowne Drive, London E8 or join the collective, which has open meetings every Thursday 6.30pm at A Woman's Place, as above.

Spare Rib Bop
March 25. 8.30-11.30pm at North London Poly, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, London N5. Jam Today, disco and bar.

Plays

The Old Wives' Tale
Until April 2. 1.15pm Monday -Saturday at the Soho Poly Theatre, 16 Riding House St, London W1 (01-636 9050). A play, by Michelene Wandor, directed by Caroline Eves, about three women in their sixties who have been friends all their lives. Tickets 60p (members 50p).

Madame Truesoul
April 7-9. 8pm at Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11 (01-223 5356). Black, White And Red: The Company Of One performs a one woman play of a woman's journey through the underworld. In addition, a one woman show by Julie Mclean.

Art

The World As We See It
Until April 30. 10.30am-8pm and Saturdays to 5pm exhibition at Swiss Cottage Library. Work in various media by women artists. The group was founded in 1975, and aims to present an unromantic view of life.

Sonia Delaunay
A touring exhibition of prints by Sonia Delaunay as illustrations to Rimbaud's poems *Illuminations*. She tried to use "pure colour not to create illusion, but as something in its own right".



Sonia Delaunay

March 25-April 1. At Brighton Gardner Centre.
April 16-May 1. At Oldham Art Gallery. Details of the rest of the tour from the Arts Council of GB, 105 Piccadilly, London W1 (01-629 9495).

Women's Writing

Alive Alive O by Sarah Black. Handwritten poems, sometimes awkward to read, delighting in puns and image-building. Published by Women In Print (76); enquiries to Compendium Bookshop, 240 Camden High St, London NW1.

Separations by Marilyn Hacker. Calm, impressive use of different forms and styles. Poems published by Alfred Knopf (New York 76). Enquiries to Compendium as above.

Hecate's Charms by Gillian Hanscombe. Conversations in poetry and prose with the goddess Hecate on the themes of exile and womanhood. Published by Khasmik Press (Sydney 75). Order from the author, 7 Hillfield Close, North Harrow, Middx.

A Woman's Work by Mary Joannou. Poems about being a woman and a poet: witty, ironic, nostalgic. Published by Our-side (St Albans 76). Order from the author, 40 Beaconsfield Rd, St Albans, Herts. Price 20p + large s.a.e.

A Bonus by Elisabeth Smart. Poems by the author of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept*, charting emotions, mostly painful ones, with admirable honesty and precision. A paragraph in a recent *Sunday Times* tells you what the poems don't: that the author's 20-year silence is explained by her

other work, that of raising four children. Published by, and available from, Polytantric Press (London 77), 21 Formosa St, London W9. Price £1.95.

Michele Roberts

Cutlasses & Earrings
An anthology by five feminists (Astra Blaug, Alison Fell, Michele Roberts, Sheila Rowbotham and Michelene Wandor), whose work is concerned with reflecting their experiences and varying politics. Available from Playbooks, 71 Belsize Lane, NW3 at 50p + 10p postage.

Reading Our Writing
April 3 at the Women's Liberation Conference, as above, and every first Sunday of the month at 2pm at A Woman's Place, as above, open readings of women's writing. All women welcome. Details from Liz (01-928 3668) or Lilian (01-224 5432).

Campaigns-Projects

Abortion & Feminism
May 8. A conference to be held in East London for all women interested in discussing why feminism affects how and why we struggle for abortion. Next Hackney National Abortion Campaign meetings: March 28 and April 11 at 16 Parkholme Rd, London E8.

Demonstrate For Abortion
May 14. National demonstration against the Benyon Bill (see News). Details of the march as well as what else you can do to fight the Bill from the National Abortion Cam-

lick

paign, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1 (01-485 4303).

Contraception
Ipswich Radical Feminist Group wants to produce a booklet on contraception. They need information on various methods and want to hear from women who have had difficulties in using or obtaining contraceptives, in the last three years. Contact them at 54 Bulwer Rd Ipswich, Suffolk.

Nurseries
"We are trying to start a nurseries campaign in Oxford and would like to hear from any groups who have had successful or unsuccessful experiences of doing so." Contact D. Vose, Oxford Women's Liberation c/o UHURU, 35 Cowley Rd, Oxford.

Into The Community
The Thames Poly Women's Rights Movement wants to hear from women in the Woolwich/Greenwich area. They are campaigning around abortion and are trying to get a nursery school going. Contact Lila (01-304 1379 evenings).

Childcare Film
Two women in Leeds are making a ten minute animated film about the necessity of a good system of childcare. The film is centred around a group of kids holding a meeting chaired by babies. It is meant for schools, colleges and community centres and will be ready next December. But they need another £2,500. Send contributions and suggestions to Gilly Lacey, 129 Spencer Place, Leeds 7.

Rape Crisis
Some women in Glasgow want to start a rape crisis centre. A lot of groundwork needs to be done (legal research, case studies, finding a building, etc.). If you are interested write to Glasgow Rape Crisis Group c/o Kathy Roberts, Rape Crisis Centre, PO Box 42, London N6 5BU.

Anti-Rape Group
They want articles, news about or related to rape, e.g. incest, images of women, rape cases ... Send them to the group c/o A Woman's Place, as above.

Namibian Women
The South West Africa People's Organisation has launched a women's campaign. "Women in Namibia face a double oppression — as Namibians under the illegal occupation of the South African regime and as women

under traditional forms of oppression." In the process of liberation war both are being confronted. Support the women of Namibia by raising money and by sending contributions (tampons, underwear, money) to Namibia Support Committee, 21-25 Tabernacle St, London EC2 (01-588 4342).



Pamphlets

Black South Africa Explodes
Well worth reading for its astonishing, mainly eyewitness account of people's courage and determination in the face of indiscriminate police violence and arrests.

The many excellent photos highlight the new militant mood of the young black and 'coloured' South Africans, who continue to escalate their demands — from the abolition of Afrikaans in schools to the end of apartheid.

Their strength and political awareness is shown in the organised strikes which were 80% effective despite the police inspired "Zulu backlash" and total poverty in the townships.

The pamphlet is a well documented, moving picture of the fearless children who continue their freedom fight against all the odds. It is available from Counter Information Services, 9 Poland St, London W1 at 90p + 20p postage.

Gillian Slovo

Bureaucrats And Women Cleaners
Written by a student and a lecturer at Durham University, this is an account of how a small group of cleaners employed there struggled for effective union representation. Meanwhile the two major unions concerned, GMWU and TGWU, concentrated on settling their own claims for negotiating rights instead of supporting the women's demands.

The incidents show clearly how heavily the odds were stacked against the cleaners. They faced all the usual problems of women workers, and their employers were a

university establishment, who used their greater articulateness to confuse and undermine the women. Also they worked part-time in a number of separate buildings, which meant that often their only contact with each other was to pick up keys. And so the women never felt able to fight effectively for themselves.

Available from Solidarity, 123 Lathom Rd, London E6. Price 10p + postage.

Rose Ades

Akeba

Published by Akeba Books, a "non-profit making publisher specialising in non-sexist children's books", *Akeba*, written by Mike Brennan, is about a small person of indeterminate sex — sometimes he, sometimes she, who discovers the neglected potential of urban life.

This large-format, paperback picture book is written in awful verse with intricate lettering that will unfortunately confuse children, but it's still a good first try — there's a nice bit in particular about a woman who is pointing a wall.

Available from Grass Roots Books, 109 Oxford Rd, Manchester M1 7DU at 30p + postage.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

Non-Sexist Teaching
The aim of the Non-Sexist Teaching Day (Oct 76), organised by the Women &

Education Group, was to discuss practical approaches to non-sexist teaching and learning. The conference report (25p + postage) and the Women & Education Newsletter, are available from Jill Norris, c/o 4 Cliffdale Drive, Crumpsall, Manchester 8.

Emergency Childbirth

A brisk, cheerful manual on how to assist at a birth in unprepared circumstances. Remarkable for its approach to the woman in labour (especially as it was originally written for the US police), and for its general perspective of non-interference in a labour, it is considerate and non-fussy — stressing the support for "a fellow human being undergoing a trying experience". There is a crisp account of the mechanics of the birth process, labour and the role of the assistant, the emphasis being on birth as "something the mother does". It also deals with less likely hazards, such as haemorrhages, breech births and resuscitation of babies. The condensed instructions at the back for quick reference during emergencies, and the illustrations throughout, are clear and informative.

Emergency Childbirth, A Manual by Gregory J. White MD is available from Compendium Bookshop, 240 Camden High St., London NW1 at 40p + postage.

Lisa Vine

Film - Photo

Women's Cinema

2.30 at the Festival Inn, Dorset Rd, London SW8 (not at the Drill Hall any more).

Membership £1; entrance 50p.

March 27. *Lina Braake* (Bernhard Sinkel W. Germany 75). An elderly woman gets even with a bank that has tricked her out of a promised flat. And *Big Chakra* (Ann Severson).

April 10. *Effect Of Gamma Rays On Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds* (Newman US 72).

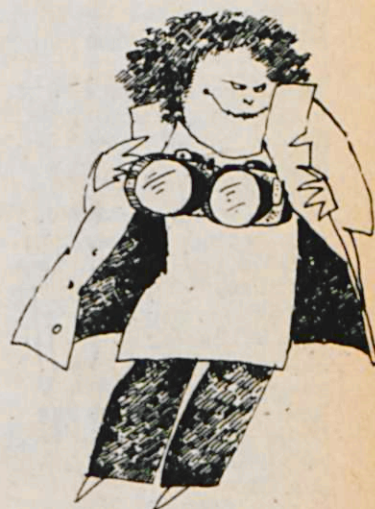
Joanne Woodward plays a widow who struggles not to retreat from life while raising two teenage daughters.

April 24. *Wives* (Anja Breien Norway 75). A spirited film about three wives taking a couple of days off together from marriage. "The film follows their spree and without ever resorting to tired polemics, it conveys innumerable reasons why we need a women's liberation movement" (SR 50). And

Hour Of Liberation about the struggle for liberation in Oman.

Hackney Flashers

March 27. From 10am day workshop at the Drill Hall, 16 Chenies St, London WC1. They welcome women interested in setting up collective projects using photography and allied media. Details (01-488 2595).



a Hackney
Flasher
flashing.

Clerkenwell Close, London EC1

Who drives the family car?

The mobility problems of young women with children and of pensioners are the subject of *Transport Realities and Planning Policy*, the latest report of the research organisation Political and Economic Planning.

In 1973 they published *Personal Mobility and Transport Problems*, which pointed out the folly of assuming that a household car was available to all members of the family, and criticised the priority given to road planning and private car use in post-war planning. At the time of that first report, the estate which so effectively imprisons Maureen was just being built.

This new study is a follow-up, concentrating on these two groups whose mobility is getting more and more restricted with 'urban sprawl' and car-orientated planning. The survey team interviewed a wide social cross-section in five areas, from large city to village, but didn't specify where the areas were or give details of conditions, though they *did* say that most of the young housewives were in new estates where they'd lived for less than eight years.

As no interviews are recorded in the report, ANNA BRIGGS decided to compare the findings with the experience of women on Maureen's estate.

They discovered that 60% of women living in large cities have no driving licence and no household car. In fact it would make little difference if there were a car in the household — men are twice as likely to have a licence, and the car is much more likely to be used by the husband for getting to work. Even in London, where over 30% go to work by public transport, not being able to drive is just as likely as anywhere else to render the family car useless to the woman left at home.

On Maureen's estate, another woman, Kathy, has a car (but no licence) and her husband uses it for work. She works in a shop, five minutes walk away. This illustrates one of the points of the survey —

"I went to see my niece at Jarrow (about five miles the other side of town). It was alright going but coming back I was near to tears. I got no help on the bus or train — I had a buggy, one two-year-old, one nine-month-old baby and two bags — and I had to rush back to get my husband's tea on the table."

Maureen lives on a council estate at the bottom of a very steep hill in Blaydon-on-Tyne, near Newcastle. Nobody can push a pram up the hill; there's no bus off the estate; they can't get through to the main road at the bottom because the council gave planning permission for a private estate which has fenced off the right of way for council tenants.

that part-time workers (mainly women) are much more likely to walk or travel by bus. This severely limits the choice of jobs — in fact it often makes it impossible to get to and from work.

Sally, a single parent with two boys aged seven and five, said she'd have to have a ten-till-two-thirty job to be able to get the kids to and from school — and there just aren't any jobs like that. Sally and the other women, like well over half the mothers PEP interviewed, said they'd like to collect their children from school, mainly because of the traffic dangers.

However, many of the children at the local primary school travel there and back alone — even the five-year-olds (over 60% of the survey mothers accompanied their five-year-olds) because the school is at the top of the steep hill and the journey's physically impossible for mothers with toddlers. The alternative would be four eightpenny bus rides each day (paying for the school-children on two of the journeys), lugging pushchairs and toddlers on and off buses. This is a classic example of planning which *forces* mothers to put their children in danger.

Prams for the Shopping
Ann lives at the top of the hill, nearer the school. I was quite exhausted when I'd climbed from Sally's house to Maureen's with my seven month old baby in a sling on my back. Ann has a nine-year-old, a six-year-old, helps to look after a neighbour's two children of about the same age, and works part-time as a home-help. She walks down

over a mile to the nearest big shopping centre for her own shopping and to get groceries and pay bills for 'her' three pensioners. (On the estate, mothers of toddlers, like Maureen, go shopping about once a week when their friends look after their children, and rely on expensive travelling shops for the rest — unlike the survey mothers, who make three to four trips a week to shopping centres.)

Ann often walks back, up the hill, with the shopping — partly because it's a 10p fare, partly because there isn't much room for shopping bags on the bus. (The survey showed that even for visiting city centres on shopping trips, only 20% of the mothers went by bus — and far less than 10% used buses to get to other shopping areas. Unreliability, expense, inadequate routing, and difficulties with children and shopping, were all seen as reasons for not using buses. Most mothers had prams to carry shopping, not just babies.)

Pensioners Usually Walk
Two of Ann's pensioners live two miles from her, and apart from pointing out that she often has to walk back from their houses, Ann says the pensioners themselves never get out, though they have free bus passes, because there are only three buses a day.

The survey found far fewer car-owning households among the pensioners than among the young mothers, and only a third of the pensioner couples had a car. Of these, again, the men usually held the licences. Only 5% of pensioners living alone (usually widows) had cars. Add to this the difficul-

ties of getting on and off buses (where there are any) and waiting in bad weather for infrequent services, and it's easy to see why pensioners usually walk — even though ill-health and dangerous pavement and traffic conditions make the journeys unpleasant or hazardous (just look at the accident rate among older pedestrians).

The survey claims that planning has been based on false assumptions — all foot journeys under one mile are not recorded in journey statistics (!) and in a cost-effectiveness exercise, the time of a working man is valued much higher than that of "non-working" people, so planning decisions are made to save time for the "high-value" people.

However, the survey found that young mothers not in full-time jobs make as many trips as their employed husbands — either for their 'own' needs (this is how the survey classifies shopping!) or for others (taking children to school, park, clinic, library, etc.) — and the way women make these journeys is not sufficiently planned for. New towns often provide easier access on foot to necessary facilities than villages, where nowadays people tend to have two cars or be isolated.

Business or Pleasure?

Our criticisms of the report were that it didn't attempt to survey the time spent at the shops, tramping round with toddlers, which is surely usually longer than the average 8–17 minutes to and from the shopping centre. It also made some rather quaint assumptions about the availability of help and chauffeuring from men in the evenings and at weekends.

**NEWS
COPY DATES:**

**for issue 58
APRIL 1
for issue 59
APRIL 29**

A personal threat

PORTSMOUTH: Mothers, wheeling children in push-chairs, turned out in force recently on a more than 150-strong demonstration against cuts in local authority spending. In just three weeks they formed a pressure group and collected over 1000 signatures in support of their campaign.

Sally Thomas, a teacher and Labour councillor said, "The campaign grew spontaneously — we hired a hall and held a public meeting after contacting people affected. Since then we've lobbied County Councillors at Winchester and had publicity on the local radio station."

The cuts will mean the end of many local projects including a children's home, a training centre for the handicapped and an old people's home. The most enthusiastic campaigners are those personally threatened by the proposed closing of the Gurney Road Day Nursery in Portsmouth. This caters for 45 children, 30 of whom come from one-parent families.

A young woman called Jenny said, "I'm separated from my husband and in the first year of a degree course. It took me a long time to decide what was best for my daughter, Susannah. She's been very happy at the nursery and has gained educationally and emotionally from the company of other kids. The staff ratio is 1:5 and they get a lot of stimulation."

Richard, who has three children under five, added, "If they close it, I don't know what I'll do. They would have to provide alternative accommodation or I'd have to give up work."

Sally Thomas summed up, "We've come together, trying to organise against the apathy. We didn't even know each other before. Now we hope to get together with other sections of the community that are threatened and set up communications. Even if we win this time, the cuts will come again next year. We want to be prepared." □

Sylvia Courtneage
STOP PRESS: Another £500,000 has been allotted to the budget covering these projects, so they've all been saved!

when the "family is together". Round here at least, it's common for men to spend their free time out of the house, in club, pub or elsewhere (though those with cars sometimes help with the main weekly shopping).

Kathy for instance said that her social and leisure trips were usually *not* made by car whereas her husband's were. This could have been found in the report statistics if the survey team had wanted to draw that conclusion. Men made more 'leisure' trips (to

places of entertainment, etc.) and women made more 'social' trips (visiting others at home). Whereas more 'leisure' trips were by car and further afield, more 'social' trips were on foot and nearer home.

Perhaps in an attempt not to be controversial, the team concluded that "women's use of buses is surprisingly low, even for those in households without a car. It indicates that women *prefer* (my italics) instead to use nearby facilities — even if they are smaller; to adjust or delay activities in

order to be able to travel by car (if there is one in the household); or to make fewer trips and sometimes to engage in fewer activities".

We all thought 'prefer' was a funny word to choose — I wish the conclusions had been entitled 'Hobson's Choice'! □

Transport Realities and Planning Policy is available from PEP, 12 Upper Belgrave St, London SW1 for £4.40 — or you can borrow Anna Briggs' copy — contact 12 Frank Place, North Shields, Tyne & Wear.

"... there isn't much room for shopping bags on the bus..."



MARK RUSHER (IFL)

Childminding in London ~ THE FACTS

In London 9,000 registered childminders provide more than half the official full-time daycare places for children under five and possibly twice as many places are provided by illegal, unregistered minders.

Full-time places are provided only by day nurseries, employers' creches (which are very rare) and childminders. And as in London 25% of mothers with under fives now go out to work, 36% of these full-time, the demand for daycare is growing (see p12).

"Childminding is the community's own response to lack of government provision for the under fives," writes Miriam Gibson, a member of the research team working on a recent report *Childminding in London**. With the cuts, local authorities look to childminding as a cheap form of daycare, so nursery campaigners often reject it entirely, also objecting to the way it mirrors an oppressive family set-up (see SR 36). Miriam Gibson argues that, given proper support, training and pay, childminders could play a useful part in daycare — "They can give more individual attention and a calmer environment than can a day nursery to children who particularly need these."

Here she outlines the report's findings about childminding now.

All that's required of local authorities by law is that they register anyone in their area who is paid for looking after other people's children in their own home for more than two hours a day. Criteria for registration are left to the individual borough, and only seven of the 21 boroughs responding to the survey specifically mention *quality* of care, though all are concerned with material conditions and health care. Most ruled that a minder is allowed to look after only three under-fives, including her own.

As most minders charge £6 to £7 per child per week, this limits their earnings to £18 or £20 a week, often for over 50 hours work. Out of this they must pay for extra heat and light in their home, the children's meals, toys, wear and tear, bus fares if they take them out and numerous other expenses. In addition there's the safety equipment the local authority insists on (safe heaters, fireguards and

stair-gates). Even the Supplementary Benefits Commission reckons that two-thirds of their 'earnings' go on expenses.

Except in one small experimental scheme in Lambeth, childminders are self-employed. Some local authorities provide subsidies, paid either direct to the minder or to the parent, for children with single parents or mothers who are chronically ill. But generally the parent foots the bill, often negotiating on a personal basis, which is very hard for the minder as most 'clients' are low earners too. As minders tend to be self-employed, holidays, sickness, insurance and pension are hardly ever covered.

What does registration actually mean? We found it was very much a formality carrying no guarantee of good care — councils are reluctant to prosecute or refuse registration, given people's desperate need for childcare. Newham were particularly pessimistic: "A decision not to register

would mean very little to the childminder concerned. She is already well-known as a person willing to look after children and even if not registered will still have plenty of clients.

"To use the present lukewarm legislation to prevent her having children would (a) create another illegal childminder (b) discourage other childminders from registration. The policy at the moment is to register, except in extreme cases, in order that supervision and hopefully education can begin."

For the minder there are few advantages to registration — it effectively limits their wages and doesn't offer much support. We found 16 local authorities did help minders with equipment either in the form of grants or loans. But of these, several helped "in exceptional circumstances only" while very few, like Lewisham, provided books, toys, safe heaters, etc., and let minders use the home help and laundry services.

Support Services

A properly supported childminding service would not only lend such equipment but also help the minder use it. The range of broadly educational schemes in London, run by both local authorities and voluntary bodies, are still reaching only a minority of minders. There are drop-in centres where minders can take the children to play; some have home visitors (or play visitors) working with them, encouraging minders to use the centre and helping with individual problems. In some areas there are informal day time courses, and some adult education institutes run special evening classes for childminders. There is scope for more effort in this field, especially as one of the big problems of looking after several under-fives is isolation. □

* *Childminding in London: a Study of Support Services for Childminders published by London Council of Social Service, 68 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JR @ £2.*

Local Mixture

BROMLEY: Around 200 women met on February 5 for the first of what is hoped to be a succession of one-day conferences for local women. Arranged by the South East Women's Forum, a group mainly of older women which grew out of Bromley Women's Aid, the conference attracted a wide cross-section of women and a variety of organisations including Women's Liberation groups, Gingerbread and Women's Cooperative Guilds.

The most controversial speaker was from the Housewives Register organisation; she gave a cosy middle-class view of 'life at home'. She felt that "there was no reason to have children if you didn't want to" and that if women "don't want to stay at home — they shouldn't have children". When asked about women who have to work for money she said, "I always leave finance out of it if possible" and "I suppose some women have to work — but I wonder".

Someone from Bromley Women's Aid talked about the problems faced since they first started in October 1975. In July 1976 they got their first house, rented from the council. She described the difficulties encountered with the local school who complained about the number of 'disturbed' children they had to take.

Later we split into workshops discussing women and health, abortion, sexuality, women at work and sex-stereotyping. The sexuality workshop decided to form a regular group.

One of the handful of men present felt it was a pity men didn't have the same sort of event, that they could benefit from the frank discussions held that day. □ Mandy Moore

A fuller report is available from Yvonne Harrison, 1 Florence Rd, Beckenham, Kent. Contact the SE Women's Forum on 01-658 0499.

Last Bastion?

LONDON: The El Vino wine bar in Fleet Street, which won't allow women to stand or buy drinks at the bar, has had its licence renewed, despite a vigorous protest from Terry Pattinson, industrial reporter on the *Daily Mirror* of all papers.

El Vino's is a men's club masquerading as a pub, he said, "a unique male citadel, the last bastion and haven of male privilege" (well, hardly the last). "Strangers walk into an ambush carefully laid by the El Vino management. What starts out to be an extremely pleasant evening in a pleasant pub can quickly turn into a nightmare of

humiliation."

The bar is owned by David Mitchell, Tory MP for Basingstoke who, as Pattinson

pointed out at the Brewster sessions at Guildhall magistrates court, voted for the Sex Discrimination Act.

But the chairman said, "We are not concerned here whether there has been a breach of the Sex Discrimination Act... so we shall renew the licence." A case against El Vino's under the SDA started on 1 January 1976, is still pending. □



LESLIE KEATING



Maire O'Brien of Irishwomen United chairing



LESLIE KEATING

Women offer banned Spare Ribs for sale — Garda Inspector Hurley looks bewildered

Irish Sisters Against the Censors

Angry reactions to the banning of 'Spare Rib' have hit the headlines of Irish newspapers like the 'Irish Times' and 'Hibernia'. Victoria Green went to Dublin to talk to Irish sisters about their campaign against the censors.

Over 500 people met in the Mansion House, Dublin, to protest against the censoring of Spare Rib. Speakers declared their opposition to the government's censorship, their support for Spare Rib and their determination to break the law and read it.

Maire O'Brien read out a telegram from Simone de Beauvoir: "Women have been the second sex for too long. The fight is only beginning. Good luck sisters." (The English translation of *The Second Sex* is banned too.)

Nell McCafferty of Irishwomen United began the sale of Spare Rib by saying, "If feminism is indecent, if Spare Rib is obscene, then we are defiantly indecent and obscene." Then she held up a copy of Spare Rib, called out her name and address and offered the magazine for sale.

The police had been standing outside the hall when the

meeting began; they'd been told the magazine would be sold (together with the banned Irish Family Planning Services guide to contraception). Though obliged by law to prevent the sales, the police were slow to come into the hall and once inside were reluctant to do anything.

Women crowded round them waving copies of Spare Rib, shouting their names and addresses; eventually the police took some names — concentrating on the younger, shyer women who looked nervous. But they did nothing to stop the selling and arrested no one.

Challenging Customs
Some of the magazines on sale had been brought that day from London. A hundred copies were brought in across the border as soon as the ban was announced. Thirty members

Wasn't it just the living end to have Spare Rib banned? There has been loads of agitation over this latest pathetic manoeuvre on the part of the Government — demos, Connolly Station occupied, letters to the Times from women's groups all over the country. The single voice is one of outrage, I bet you never knew that you were needed, admired, DEPENDENT upon by Irish women.

I have nothing but praise for the mag and the women who put it together. To call it offensive or obscene — well, words fail me. It's not even particularly emotional. It's like a newsheet for women, it's that practical and informative. I feel very sure that if we're to be deprived of a magazine of this sort, it will put us back another few years and further demoralise the women's groups here who are making their own, however small, contributions to the advancement of social equality for the women of Ireland.

— from a letter from an Irish sister

of Irishwomen United went by train to Belfast, picked up the copies and returned with them to Dublin. At the border, in Dundalk, "We challenged the customs. We said 'We're bringing copies of Spare Rib into the Republic . . . what are you going to do about it?'" But customs did nothing.

In Dublin, however, the police were waiting at the station. They tried to arrest two women and snatch copies of Spare Rib, but failed because supporting demonstrators intervened.

Leaflets and posters advertising the Mansion House meeting went out all over

Dublin. One woman, Marie McMahon, was arrested for posterage. She was held by the police for nine hours under the Emergency Powers Act and interrogated about her attitude to contraception.

The ban on Spare Rib will last for six months. If, after that time, there is another ban it will be permanent.

Irishwomen United are holding their International Women's Day march around the issue of censorship and the banning of Spare Rib, and are selling copies on the streets. □

Contact: Irishwomen United, 12 Lower Pembroke Street, Dublin 2.

Four Irish women chained themselves to the railings outside Downing St on March 1, protesting against the denial of political status to prisoners in Northern Irish jails.

They'd come to London for a day of protest organised by the Relatives Action Committee — dressing only in blankets as a symbol of internees' refusal to wear prison uniform. Police surrounded them, laughed uneasily and broke the chains with enormous pincers. The four were arrested. □

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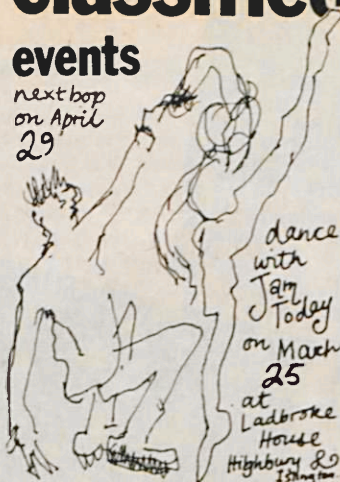
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●Irish Liaison Committee public meeting on WOMEN IN IRELAND, "Roebuck" pub, Tottenham Court Road, London W1. Friday 1st April 8pm. Everyone welcome.

●PUBLIC MEETING
13 April 7.45pm
commemorating trial
of Charles Bradlaugh
Annie Besant, pioneers
of family planning
Conway Hall
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National Secular
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● 11 SEMINARS ON CENSORSHIP: books + magazines 24 March, visual arts 31 March, films 21/28 April, 7pm. Defence of Literature + the Arts Society/ICA Nash House London SW1. 85p (DLAS mems 75p) booking/details 01-930 6393.

●Conference on THE AMERICAN WOMAN Saturday 14 May 1977, held by University of Edinburgh North American Studies Programme. For further details contact Conference Organiser Ms. Faith Pullin, Dept. of English Literature, University of Edinburgh, David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JX.



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● **Islington Task Force** requires fourth worker for work with pensioners in the borough. Commitment to collective work situation essential. Salary £2,800 p.a. — 35 hour week. Application forms from Task Force, 10 Corsica St, London N5 (01-359 0056/7).

● **FEMINIST MEDICAL PRACTITIONER NEEDED**. Like to come to Sunny Sydney in New South Wales, work as a member of our Collective? Orthodox + alternative medicine, gynaecological + counselling. We're very friendly + conditions are good. Cost of fare + transport to be arranged with Australian Dept. of Immigration. Salary negotiable. Please contact The Collective, Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre, 164 Flood Street, LEICHHARDT, N.S.W. 2040, AUSTRALIA.

● **VIRAGO** needs **WOMEN** designers, **EXPERIENCED** in book design, book cover design, typography, paste-up and layout; advertisement and catalogue design. **URGENT**, please phone or write to Virago, 3 Cheyne Place, Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 (01-352 0524)

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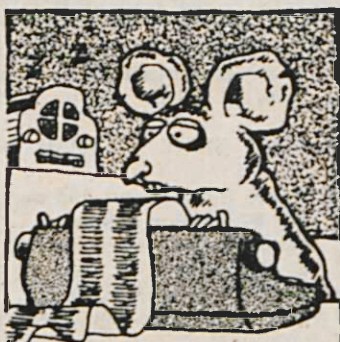
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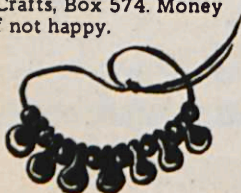
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A Week Like Any Other

Natalia Baranskaya

Translated by Pauline Jaray

Olga, a young Moscow mother and technical worker, finds herself in a constant worry about her work and domestic schedules. A government survey on women generated discussion among her workmates, and the questions about absenteeism hit hard at Olga's particular insecurities. Unable to understand her own bursts of resentment, she explained everything away as 'a passing depression'. At home, Olga wrestled with a typical morning — dressing two squirming toddlers, cooking breakfast — while her husband Dima took things at a more relaxed pace and failed to grasp why she got in such a flap. At work, feelings about the questionnaire ran high, and the violent political argument which eventually broke out made Olga ponder how much free choice she'd really had about motherhood. Olga treated herself to a young, boyish haircut which took her thoughts back to more leisurely and romantic times before she and Dima married. Dima caught the feeling too — so they forgot to set the alarm.

Part 5
Thursday

We leapt out of bed at half past six. Dima dashed off to wake the children, I rushed into the kitchen — just to put on the coffee and milk — then into the nursery to help him. It looks as if we might manage to get ready in time. But suddenly Kotka, having drunk his milk, declares: "I am not going to nursery-school."

We both together:

"Don't start playing up!"

"Get dressed!"

"We've got to be off."

"We're going."

No. He shakes his head, scowls, any minute he is going to cry. I crouch down by him: "Kotya, now tell mummy and daddy, what happened? What's the matter?"

"Maya Mikhailovna punished me, I'm not going."

"Punished you? Well, obviously you were naughty, didn't do what you were told..."

"No, I wasn't naughty. But she punished me. I'm not going."

We start dressing him by force, he begins to push and kick, and bursts into tears. I repeat over and over again: "Kotya, get dressed, we've got to go, Kotya, daddy and I will be late for work."

Then Dima hits upon the idea to say: "Come, let's go, I'm going to talk to Maya Mikhailovna and find out what happened there."

Kotka, redfaced, sweating, bathed in tears, tries to tell, sobbing: "It was Vitka who knocked it over, not me... it broke... but I was made to sit down all by myself on a bench... It wasn't me! It wasn't me!" — and starts sobbing again.

"What broke?"

"The flowerpot..."

I very nearly burst into tears myself, I'm so sorry for the little soul. It's horrible to drag him out forcibly when he feels so wounded. And how awful — he's sweating all over, he might easily catch a cold. I press Dima to find out everything about the incident, and to tell the nursery school teacher how frightened Kotka is.

"OK, OK, don't get so het up," says Dima sternly, "they've got twenty eight kids there, mistakes can happen."

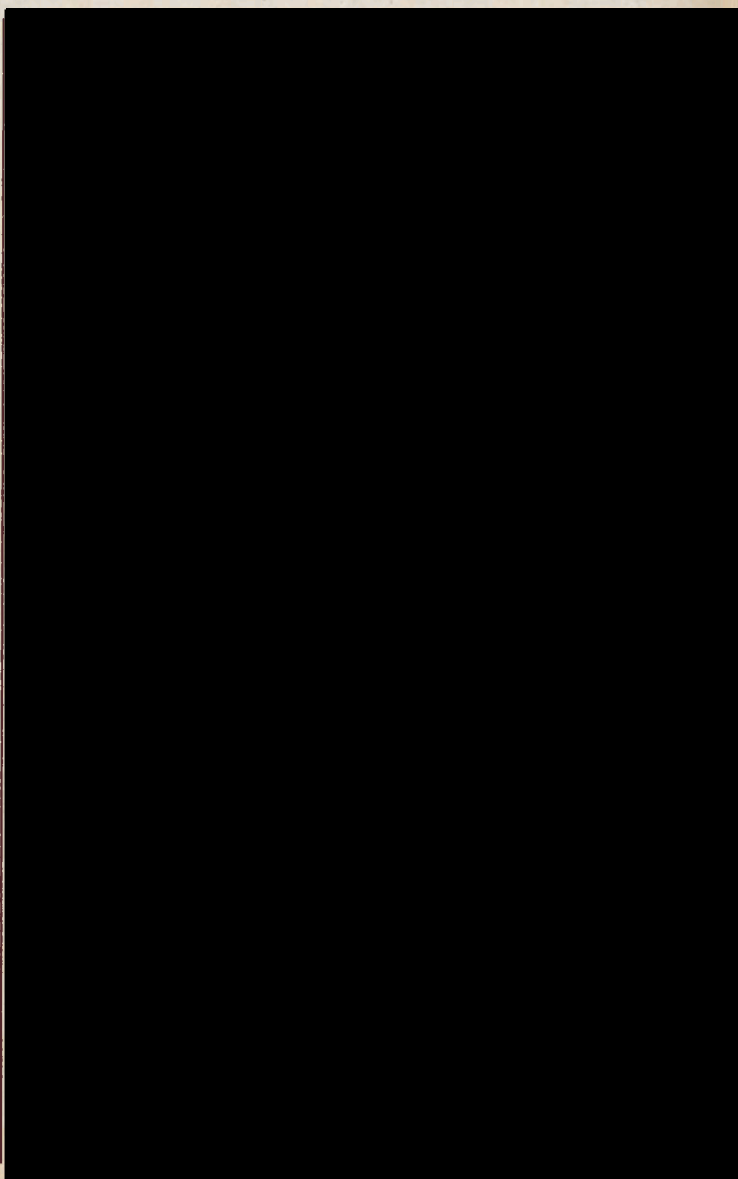
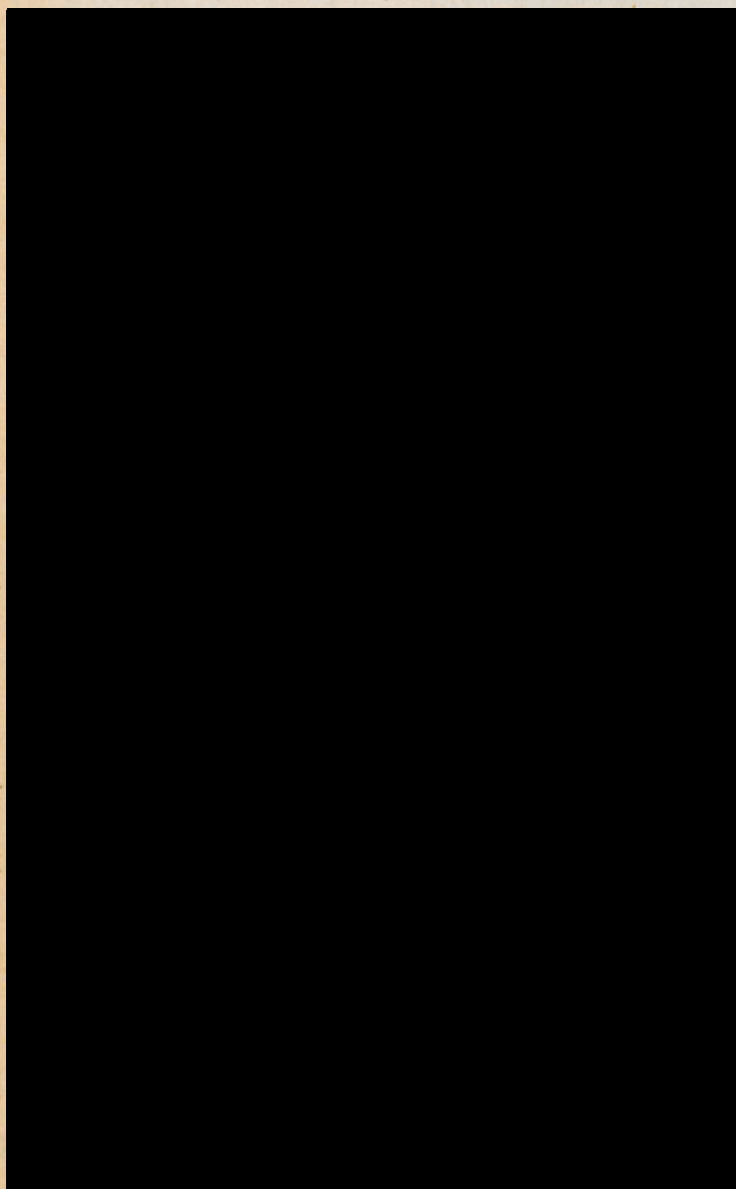
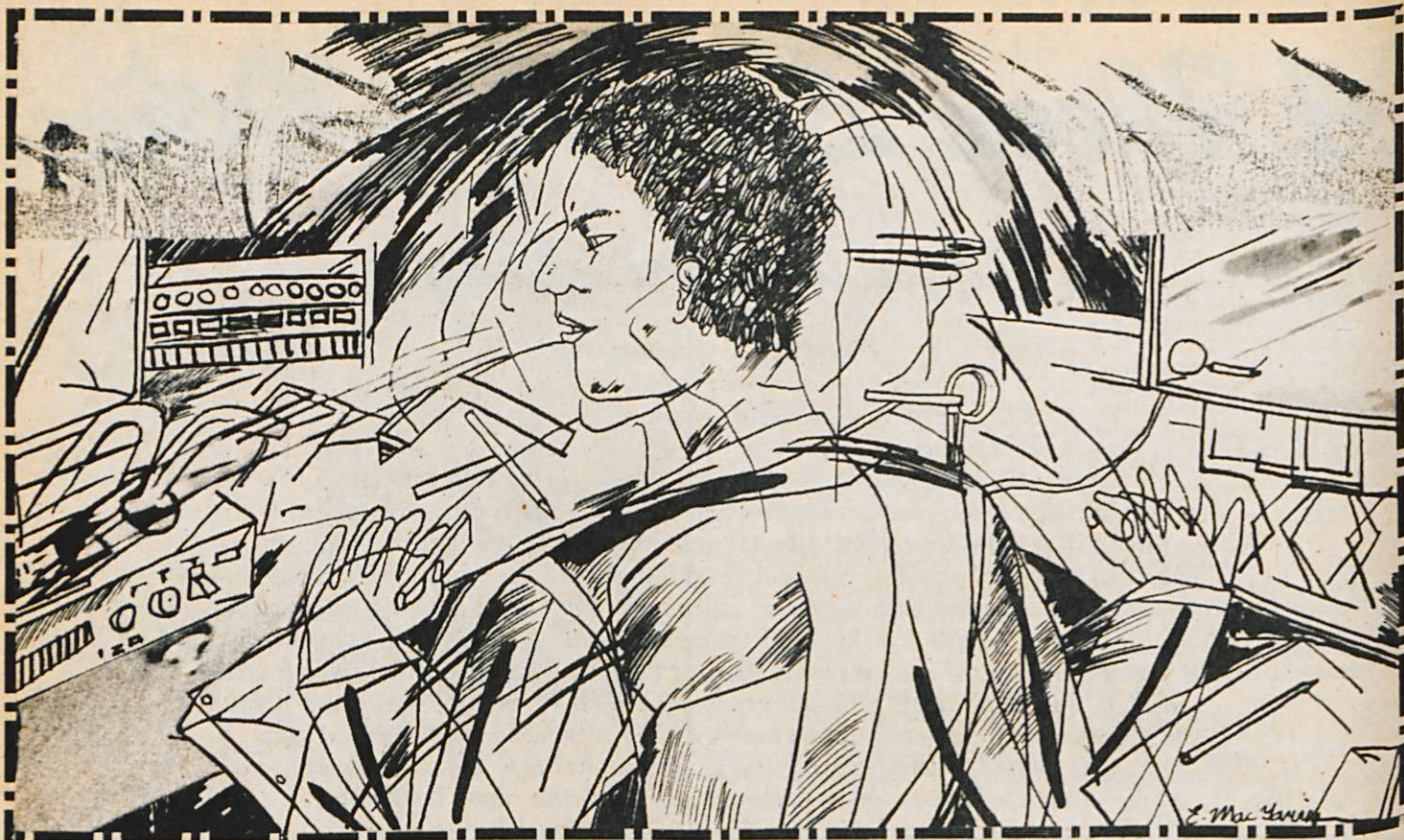
And now suddenly Gulka, who's been calm right up to the last minute, bursts into tears and puts her hands out to me: "I want to come to mummy."

I abandon them all in a rush, and from the staircase I shout to Dima: "Be sure to phone me!" I race downstairs, to the bus, I try to storm the first one, then the second... at last I get on to the third.

On the way I keep thinking about Kotka. There really are twenty eight kids in the group, and of course it happens sometimes that the teacher can't give them all undivided attention, or perhaps just hasn't got the strength for all of them. But surely it would be better not to find out anything at all about what happened, rather than find out only the half of it, and punish unjustly...

I remember how the headmistress talked to me when Kotka was transferred to our new nursery school, and how she tried to persuade me to work as assistant. "The teacher helps with putting up the folding beds and making them up, with dressing the children for their walk." It is obvious, they've got enough on their plate, the teacher as well as the assistant. Imagine — twenty five pairs of trousers, scarves, caps, twenty five pairs of socks, of booties, of mittens, and on top of that overcoats, mufflers, fastening all the belts. All this has got to be put on twice, taken off once, and once more after their afternoon rest. Twenty-five. What sort of "norm" is that, whose idea was it? Probably somebody without children, or someone whose children don't go to nursery school.

As soon as I'm in the underground realisation flashes on me — we've got our politics class today, our seminar, and I left the programme at home, didn't even remember to look at it. I was going to prepare a question, and... forgot! We have these classes once every two months, of course it's possible to forget about them. But once I took it on I ought not to have forgotten it. Oh well, I'll go, I'll take Lucy Markoryan's programme, maybe I'll



reviews

FILM

BACK TO BAMBI

On my daughter's seventh birthday I took her and two friends to see *Bambi*. I had seen this film fifteen years ago and remembered a slight, charming and attractive idyll with an ecological message. I discovered a film which seemed to be trying to convince my daughter of the inevitability and the correctness of her eventual role in society.

The film opens with Bambi's birth. A serene, curly-lashed mother relaxes in the forest with her fragile young son beside her, an image of peace and love. In the distance a figure of a stag looking on — proud, remote, separate. He approves of the scene, but is not part of it. His fatherhood is only implied. He is the King: all wise, all knowing, guardian of the forest and its inhabitants. There is no gesture of affection or tenderness towards the mother, and although she embodies maternal love she is not worthy of recognition.

This view of the family might be justified on the grounds that it accurately reflects the life of deer. But the values drawn from the presentation are *human* values, and the animals in the forest behave and react as if they were human.

Thumper, Bambi's rabbit friend, is also placed within a nuclear family, but significantly Thumper's father never actually appears on the screen. His commands are conveyed to the children by the mother and placed firmly in a domestic context: "Thumper! What did your father say to you at breakfast?" So the sub-plot underlines the main theme: fatherhood is remote, powerful, authoritarian; motherhood is warm, loving, day-to-day care.

Other values clearly emerge in the episode when Bambi meets Fraline, a female fawn. Fraline, although the same age, is Bambi's superior. She is quicker, more intelligent, more mischievous and deliberately sets out to tease Bambi. By comparison he is



awkward and evidently miserable. Suddenly the atmosphere changes. The screen fills with images of speed, power and strength: a herd of stags rushes by. Bambi watches the powerful animals fight, the sounds of their battle echoing through the forest. He turns to Fraline. He makes the same butting gesture with his head. Fraline backs off with startled respect.

Although Fraline is quicker and smarter than Bambi, he is her superior because he is the male, and because eventually he will be the physically stronger. Later in the film, this greater strength is used to rescue her from a pack of hounds, so the female learns she must accept her inferior status in order to gain this protection.

But what does she need protection from? The other form of violence in the film is the violence of Man which threatens to destroy both the community of animals and the forest itself. The power of the stags is presented as exciting, and purposeful: to protect the hinds and fawns. But Man's violence is seen as essentially motiveless, either destruction for its own sake (the shooting down of helpless birds) or through thoughtlessness (the casual starting of a forest fire). In the film we identify with the animals, who are given our feelings and attitudes. If *we* are the animals, who is Man? Perhaps it is significant that the film was made in 1942: Man could be seen as representing the Enemy, intrinsically evil.

Man's relationship with the animal world exactly mirrors the relationship between the male animals and their families. Man, too, is never represented on screen. He is seen to act through his agents (the gun and the dogs) just as the other male authority figures in the film interact with their children through *their* agents — females. Man's threat of violence seems specifically directed towards the female animals in the film. Bambi's mother is shot, Fraline is attacked by hounds. It is precisely because of this threat that the females need the male strength; they need male violence to shelter themselves from this *unrestricted* masculine violence.

But why does the male protect the female in the film? Because he is bound to her by love, and the nature of this love is clearly shown in the film.

The courtship episode is deliberately lighthearted. It is very difficult to write seriously about the values it contains without appearing over-serious and humourless. *The Times* (1942) review described the whole incident as a "charmingly absurd account of courtship and young love" only "momentarily marred by vulgarity". But the very lighthearted way in which adolescent love is handled is a value-judgement in itself. The bond which links male to female

is seen as being essentially trivial. The behaviour of the courting animals is described by the owl, wise monitor to the young males, as being both ridiculous and inevitable. Friendship and mutual respect only exist in a relationship between males.

So if a female wishes to catch her man she must first separate him from his friends. She does this by emphasising her physical charms: her curly eyelashes and her flickering tail. The relationship she initiates is not between equals, but between a predator and victim. The victim's behaviour is incomprehensible to his companions until they, too, fall into the same trap. Yet for this relationship, based on trickery and deceit, the male eventually risks death in order to save his mate. Only when Bambi falls in love is there any suggestion of mutual respect and affection, and even here it is Fraline's beauty and vulnerability that is emphasised, rather than her strength and dignity.

By the end of the film, Bambi has become his father, proud, aloof, separate from the mother and his children, the very nobility of his stance relegating her to an inferior position. In the forest glade sits Fraline, the Mother. Beside her are her two fawns, one male and one female. The cycle begins again.

Margaret Littlewood

BOOKS for children

DAYLIGHT ROBBERY

by Jay Williams
(Kestrel £2.25)

Daylight Robbery by US writer Jay Williams starts promisingly as Penny Bloom, nearly 13 and a budding civil engineer into bridge building, has a row with her father about the way she dresses — "... you dress like a workman. No, I'm wrong, no self-respecting labourer would show up in a shirt like that." But the early promise of this potential conflict, leading the reader to hope for one of those funny, punchy American novels for teenagers about the contemporary world (see for example Lila Perl's *That Crazy April*, reviewed SR 37) is not

fulfilled. Here humour is notable for its absence. The dutiful young reader who ploughs on to the end of this book will be told: "Actually, that was what bridges were for, to get across from one place to another. Or from one person to another." For 10 years and upwards.

THE INLAND WHALE

by Theodora Kroeber
(Gollancz £2.95)

Theodora Kroeber is also from the US but here we are on happier ground — California in fact and the legends of its native Americans (Indians). One of the striking features of

this book, for the British reader at least, is the total absence of the smoke-um-peace-pipe stereotype that we have had pushed down our throats for so long.

Each of the nine stories retold here has a woman or girl as the central character. Their themes revolve around female roles and rites and ignore the usual taboos about subject matter suitable for children. Incest, for example, is the theme of 'The Loon Woman'. There is a fascinating version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story in 'The Man's Wife', a treatment of the conflict between love and social position in 'The Inland Whale' and so forth, all the tales stringently and beautifully told. This powerful book will appeal to adults as well as to children. This is children's literature at its best. (Book fans might be interested to know that Theodora Kroeber is Ursula le Guin's Mum.)

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

PHOEBE AND THE HOT WATER BOTTLES

by Terry Furchgott and

Linda Dawson

Illustrated by Terry Furchgott
(Deutsch £2.75)

Phoebe lives with her aging



Sometimes when I listen to Mum's tummy I can't hear anything,
but sometimes I can feel my little sister kicking.

MY NEW SISTER by Bo Jarner (A & C Black £1.25)

Clear and interesting photos tell of Sarah's happy birth and of where first-born fits in. Strong features are the very real midwife and supportive, nappy-changing, bottle feeding Dad. Highly recommended.

Andrew Mann, CRW

overworked chemist father. Her life is full of hot water bottles which she is given as presents at Xmas, etc. In fact, she has 157 of them which she makes the most of, taking them around everywhere with her. There's a lively picture of kids playing around with her hot water bottles in the swimming pool. The water bottles come in handy to help Phoebe put out a fire in the chemist's shop, and she is rewarded with what she really wants — a puppy. Some nice touches and pictures in this non-sexist, non-racist, but unlikely picture book fantasy.

LINDA AND THE LIGHTHOUSE

by Jonathan Wills

(Canongate £2.50)

Linda accompanies her lighthouse keeper Dad as he is taken out to the lighthouse rocks for his four week shift. She is brought home by the lifeboat crew to Mum and tea, cosy and safe from the man's world outside. But the strength of this picture book is the bright full colour illustrations which, with the text, give a warm and informative picture of life and work on the Shetland Isles and the high seas — all through the eyes of a little girl.

Andrew Mann
CRW

BOOKS

poetry

SEVEN WOMEN

by Astra, Sally Berry, Caroline

Gilfillan, Judith Kazantzis,

Chandra Masoliver, Lilian Mohin

and Sheila Shulman

(Women's Literature Collective

75p)

The brief introduction to this collection of poetry (and one piece of prose) by a collective of seven women says: "Over the past three years we have been talking about ourselves/our work. Our writing has grown with our meetings."

The poems give a woman's perspective on the world, one enriched by contact with other women. The authors do not refer explicitly to the women's movement or to its ideas; these are present as a background to their writing. The authors come across as richly individual in their choice of subject-matter and their treatment of it.

I found the way they deal with the mother-child theme fascinating; each author mining the density of its conflicts in a fresh way. The tools for this were as various: direct statement; the retelling of Greek myth; reference to dreams; spin-offs from particular moments; re-ordering of memories of childhood.

Another theme running throughout the book is that of struggle, between women, between men and women. None of the poems about love is simple; conflict is either directly referred to, or else you get a feeling of it through the silences between words of longing. The poems I liked the most were the ones in which painful feelings are directly and honestly expressed; I admire the courage of that. I also very much liked the poems which lured me into their worlds through careful choice of words, sudden stunning images, attention paid to sound and rhythm.

This book is affirming for women, because it speaks of experiences traditionally ignored or despised by our culture, and also because it represents three years of collective work finally concretized and available to other people. Presumably other writers' groups, given time, determination and money (hopefully a grant squeezed out of the Arts Council), could feel encouraged to produce something themselves too. The book

was published by the group with help from other women on layout, paste-up and photographs. It's their fourth collection of poetry and prose in pamphlet form. Orders and enquiries, plus large s.a.e., to the Women's Literature Collective, c/o 32 Ladbroke Grove, London W11.

Michele Roberts

CRACKS

by Lilian Mohin

40p

These poems, written in 1974 and 1975, focus mainly on personal relationships and their power structures. Lilian Mohin describes love as a battle. Bedtime needs strategies "who falls asleep first/is about power". And: "In this game/ the fact that you remain conscious/is supposed to mean i'm winning".

They're good tough poems, which work because of their honesty, brevity and neat images. Lilian offers us pictures we can recognize: in 'Randy Women', the man with his eyes on a book and his hand up your skirt. She makes our imagination leap into other situations: despair on a hot spring day; physical memories of past love-affairs.

Lilian struggles with the problems posed by language, how to form new words to describe the oppressive reality of which she is newly aware: "being that ball/you sometimes toss/against a wall/just so i can feel your hands on me/is there a word for that?" One person's reality may not be another's; the battle is also like a race towards meaning, Lilian lassoing her opponent with her own words before he strings her up with his. Poetry becomes a means of claiming power, though in silence: "passion, our tongues/suddenly you ask what i'm thinking/a trick of yours/displaying interest/or a way of not saying of doing/what you're/thinking/ i don't say/i was arranging the words/of this poem."

The poems I liked best were the short ones where she is energetically loving, angry, tender. The book, designed and printed at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts by Lilian herself, is a pleasure to look at with its clear dark-brown type on creamy paper and its sepia portraits of Victorian and Edwardian women. Orders and enquiries, plus large s.a.e., to Lilian Mohin, 89 Ladbroke Grove, London W11.

Michele Roberts

THE FACTS OF RAPE

by Barbara Toner

(Hutchinson £3.75,

Arrow 90p)

Facts about rape are hard to come by, and the popular need for them belies a common belief that nothing really happens unless it can be scientifically proved. Certainly some statistics uncovered by Menachem Amir in a four year study of reported rapes in Philadelphia, USA, have been highly instrumental in counter-acting prevailing anti-female myths about rape. But it strikes me that while we concentrate on statistics we miss the overall reality. And this comes not only from the experience of women who have been raped, but from all of us who have been hassled on the streets, and felt the threat and fear of violence from men.

Barbara Toner tries very hard in this book to be a serious and objective researcher. She clearly outlines the history of rape, attitudes and the process of the law and police. Her first chapter recounts in detail the rape and trial of a woman whose rapist was acquitted. The

Facts of Rape also gives information that hasn't been readily available in Britain and, if read with discernment gives some useful clues on how best to pursue a prosecution — if you can re-experience the feelings you had at the time.

However in her attempt to be fair to men and to accommodate holier-than-thou reaction [and if the reviews are anything to go by she's succeeded. Eds] she comes to the general conclusion that "most rape is an opportunist crime arising from sexual confusion"; in other words that women don't know what they want and that men can be understood, perhaps even excused, for taking advantage. Her main concern is to discount those rapes which happen between unmarried people in dating and pick-up situations, in his or her own home. Everything is fine, he or she invites the other in for coffee, but when at whatever stage of the game, she says no, he says "bugger that", and carries on using whatever force is necessary. This is not, as Barbara Toner would have us believe, rape arising from sexual confusion or "rough love play", but rape arising from men's

contempt for the autonomy and sexual self determination of women. Rape and the fear of it is a powerful social control . . . it keeps women in their place.

In this attempt to understand why men rape, Ms Toner fails to ask why women don't. She, and the male establishment, see rape as primarily a sexual act. But rape has nothing to do with sexual needs. It's a violent and humiliating crime against women which uses the aping of a sexual act (as well as buggery, forced oral penetration, urinating, defecating and spitting on the woman) as a means of expressing hatred and contempt. Rape is an expression of power not sexual desire.

Ms Toner also puts down women for conforming to male standards of acceptable female behaviour without asking why they do. "Who is to blame for nurturing the outdated and insulting stereotypes? It would be easy to answer men, for it is clear that they serve men better than women. But that would be far too easy and wrong . . . many women cherish the prejudices that the concepts

engender." So, if by some unfortunate chance you haven't caught your man with your devastating intellect for Christ's sake don't run the risk of confusing him by looking good and thus inviting him to rape you. After all you are not a human being, you're a stereotype. In addition, she seems to forget that it doesn't matter how you dress or how attractive you are — babies of seven months and women of ninety have been raped.

The Facts of Rape is an informative book but it is also insidiously dangerous. It is the work of a woman who pretends to be objective, tries to be fair but is frightened to commit herself to a feminist analysis when all her information points in that direction. Her omission to tackle basic myths and draw firm conclusions makes me all the more grateful that Susan Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will, Men Women and Rape* (Penguin 95p) is available in this country. I would recommend anyone to read *The Facts of Rape* with a very critical eye.

Jenni Hall

THE RAPE VICTIM

by Elaine Hilberman

Dr Hilberman sees rape as 'a crime against the person and not the hymen'. It is the ultimate violation of the self short of homicide, an act of violence and humiliation in which not only is the victim's very existence threatened, and her inner and most private space invaded, but her autonomy and control are totally demolished. If, and when the victim reports the crime she is immediately confronted with a complex series of additional stresses arising from her contact with the hospital, police, courts, media and community opinion.

There are many mythologies about rape, but in recent years behavioural scientists have accumulated a body of information about rape and the unfolding series of reactions experienced by the victim after rape. The aim of this concise, tightly reasoned book is to summarise what is now known about the needs and experiences of the victim and her family, and what is so important, to provide a framework in which the doctor can more knowledgeably supply assistance and support.

Paper £5.95

To be published mid-March

Harper & Row Publishers Ltd.,
28 Tavistock Street, London WC2E 7PN

IS THIS YOUR LIFE?

Images of Women in
the Media

edited by Josephine King

and Mary Stott

(Virago £1.95)

Is This Your Life? consists of ten essays produced by Women in Media and covers ten areas including TV, radio, comics, newspapers, magazines, films, advertising and popular music. The essays discuss the employment and the representation of women in the media.

Much of the material was compiled a couple of years ago, and the fact that it still reflects the current position and image of women indicates the difficulties and slow progress involved in trying to change traditional stereotypes. Feminist concerns are however being incorporated into journalism and broadcasting (note a couple of recent BBC Plays For Today: 'Housewives Choice' and 'Do as I Say'). It would have been helpful if this book could have addressed itself more to the problems of misrepresentation of the women's movement and the building of 'new' stereotypes, rather than going over old ground and describing the more recognisable forms of oppression.

The essays provide a useful general guide and the sections on Newspapers and Radio are particularly interesting. Pat Barr, in her essay on Newspapers, does refer briefly to the contradictions inherent in the depiction of 'women's liberation' and acknowledges the complexities involved in presenting feminist points of view in the press.

Mileva Ross has written an informative chapter on Radio, but in making a plea for more women DJ's and newreaders she never asks herself the crucial question: "What's the point of having more women reading news if it's still going to be the same old news?" No attempt is made here, or elsewhere in the book, to analyse critically current definitions of "news" or media content in relation to wider structures of ownership and control in the media industry. There is no reference to the debate on the "legitimising" function of the media in capitalist society and how it maintains bourgeois social and sexual relations.

The need for deeper analysis is illustrated by the account of the arrival of phone-in programmes on radio in the 1970s which Ross argues: "... have probably done more than anything else in broadcasting to break the restrictive practices against women in talk shows . . . Women at home take a lively part in these open-line

discussions." Which women are Ms Ross referring to? Is she aware that 50% of the population of England do not even have a phone in their home? It is well known that DJ's exercise almost total control over incoming calls and the myth of "public access" to broadcasting demands study not acceptance.

I enjoyed reading this book but I cannot bring myself to share Mileva Ross's grief over the fact that there is no female equivalent of a Robin Day or Robert Robinson.

Helen Baehr

PLAYS

PENTHESILEA

Salt Theatre Company

In 1808 the distraught poet, Heinrich Von Kleist, wrote a particularly bloodthirsty verse tragedy called 'Penthesilea', based on a mythical encounter between Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, and Achilles, the Greek warrior. Salt Theatre's adaptation of the story has been shifted to look at male and female sexuality. The sexual conflicts are played out on a psychological, as well as a physical battlefield. Victory vacillates uncertainly between the women and men; and as the battle rages we discover the history of the war and the characters ambivalent attitudes towards it.

It is in the telling of the Amazons' history that Miche-

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SALT Theatre's *Penthesilea*

lene Wandor's adaptation is at its most forceful. Their story is of a revolution against a conquering male army who killed the men of the Amazon tribe and subjected the women to sexual slavery. For nine months the women carried their oppressors' children; all the while sharpening their brooches and rings, symbols of their oppression, into the most deadly weapons. Then they overthrew their oppressors and established a separatist state in which contact with men was, and is, limited to the ritualistic festival of reproduction, the Festival of Roses. The men necessary for this ceremony are reaped from the field of battle, and live as prisoners with the Amazons for two months before returning home.

The intrusion of men into their otherwise female world is as disturbing for the Amazons as fighting an army of women is for the Greeks. It is on the battlefield that the men and women search for knowledge of one another. As they struggle on the ground in an endless cycle of domination and submission they keep repeating the question "What is it like down there?" Penthesilea's relationship with Achilles personifies the confusion of the two armies; they both change through mutual contact but no resolution of their conflict is possible. Ultimately Achilles lays aside his weapons and armour and offers himself as a prisoner to Penthesilea; she, misunderstanding his actions, sets her dogs on him and helps them to rip him to pieces with her teeth.

Penthesilea's story raises important questions about separatism, sexuality and sex roles, all of great interest to the women's movement. How-

ever, watching Salt Theatre's production I didn't feel the company had really tackled the political implications of the material. I felt as if the women in the company were nervous of exploring the nature of a separatist community and the men were equally tentative about examining male sex roles. Stylistically the company is working towards a vocal and physical method of performance which is as demanding as their material. They are attempting ways of expressing themselves with sound and movement — not just relying on dialogue. But it will take time, and no doubt money, before they can develop the techniques they require.

Jules Hollidge
March 25/26, Stage One,
Deanery Road, London E15.
April 10/11, Arts Centre,
Bristol.

For bookings and information
contact Salt Theatre, Battersea
Arts Centre, London SW11
(01-223 5363).

WATCH OUT

★ A bleak month this. Last time there was lots to choose from — a newspaper TV critic coined the phrase "Women's Week" because there were actually three programmes of special interest to women — but now everything's back to normal.

Two new series sounded interesting: *Fathers and Families* (BBC1) and *The Velvet Glove* (BBC2). Not until the fourth episode of *The Velvet Glove* (what kind of title this, for a Great Women series?) which portrayed Elizabeth Fry the prison

reformer were we allowed a heroine who wasn't mad, senile or both. As usual she was fanatical and certainly needed to be, what with nine children, a rigid Quaker background and the conviction that "a mother's duty extends beyond the domestic".

This theme of the conflict between public work and personal happiness was reduced to parody in Fay Weldon's caricature of Marie Stopes. The next day critics gleefully drew the conclusion that women who pioneer the cause of the emancipation of their sex always have miserable love lives and castrate their men. Feminists be warned!

It's good to see that the BBC acknowledges that fathers have families but this series of John Hopkins' plays was unspeakable rubbish. The second episode was billed in several papers as an exploration of the problems facing an unmarried mother. The woman turns out to be completely unable to cope, totally dependent on men and hysterical. She finally solves her problems by giving up the child for adoption (the only sensible choice of course) and flying off to vacation in Corfu: as good a piece of anti-woman propaganda as you're likely to come across on a cold February evening.

As for the fourth play in the series, Susan Fletcher wrote us this letter: *Dear Spare Rib, Is there any effective way we can register a complaint to the BBC for their screening last night (22 Feb) of the play in the "Fathers and Families" series? A major part of the plot was as follows:*

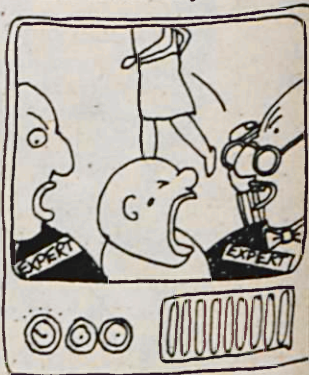
Daughter is pregnant, quite clear in her mind that she doesn't want to marry the father or to have the baby, and comes to her father to get the money for an abortion. Daddy refuses, on moral grounds, and states his own view very positively: she should marry the father and have the child. She obtains the money elsewhere, has the

abortion, but suffers pangs of remorse, and when Daddy visits her in the clinic she stages a scene to gladden the hearts of SPUC (the anti-abortion organisation): Why did I do it? I've killed my baby... They tore out part of me... There was so much blood...

It seems pretty scandalous to me to show this piece of nonsense only three days before the second reading in the House of Commons of the Benyon Abortion Amendment Bill. I'm sure there are only too many people who will see it as support for their own ill-considered theories on this very emotive subject. And although the damage in this case has already been done, it might be worth trying to prevent a similar incident in the future.

Jean McCrindle
Eleanor Stephens

★ Finally remembered to watch *Other People's Children* on BBC1 Sunday lunchtime (20 Feb). The series is for childminders and while the content was sound — stressing the importance of talking and playing with even the youngest baby — the presentation was to say the least, unfortunate: the male presenter, Brian Redhead (wonder how much child-minding he does?), and the male expert, a paediatrician, talked at and over three pairs of babies and minders. Each woman sat silently by her



baby, patiently listening to the men sounding off to each other and the viewers. In one case the minder was stuck between them and had to turn her head from one to the other like a spectator at a tennis match.

Apart from hating this patronising approach, I can't help suspecting that the recent surge of interest in child-minding (*The Guardian* 'Campaign', the BBC series, the recent report — see *News*) is meant to distract our attention from the continuing cuts in child-care facilities.

E.S.

Poetry, *Spare Rib* 55, p38. The title should have read *Lesbian mum to her father* and line 16 should have read *the crush of the great bear*. Apologies to Eve Fitzpatrick.

*We're off on
our Spring
Subscription
Drive*

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WOMEN'S ARTS CENTRE

The Women's Arts Alliance has premises near Regent's Park, London. There women can exhibit art work, learn creative skills, give performances, poetry readings, slide shows and hold discussion groups.

It has recently changed to being organised by an open collective of women. They meet on the first Monday of each month at 7pm. All women are welcome.

Activities at the Alliance are roughly divided between the workshops of Womanschool, the gallery and Sunday afternoon events. They also run a feminist bookstore.

The gallery is open Monday to Friday, 11am to 6pm. Work is selected by a group in the collective; their only stipulation is that it is by women. Friday evening seminars are taking place in which the women exhibiting work can meet and talk to the public and critics. The Alliance has also initiated a series of Sunday afternoon panel discussions on "Points of view on Women's Art Practice". Discussions cover a number of different viewpoints on what characterizes women's art practice, how it relates to the women's movement and to the art establishment.

Womanschool offers a variety of evening workshops including African drumming, karate, co-counselling, poetry, diary writing, life drawing, weaving and yoga. Each woman attending a workshop pays a small fee per session. A percentage of this money goes to the Alliance to pay for rent and utilities and the rest is paid to the women running the workshop.

On Sundays at 3pm there's a place for women to play music, read poetry, do any kind of performance event in an informal and feminist atmosphere. Poetry readings take place regularly on the third Sunday of every month. There is space for more Sunday events and suggestions or offers to perform are welcome.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MICHAEL ANN MULLEN



T'ai Chi Chuan, Co-Counselling
Theatre, African Drumming,
WOMANSCHOOL



THE GALLERY



Supermarket shelf from exhibition
"Off the Fence"



Sketchbooks from exhibition
"Not the Object"



SUNDAY AT 3PM
poetry reading

Future events: Linda Mallett "Notes on the Rebirth Mythology" until March 25th; in April, a series of performances and environmental events including work by Maria Skwarczewska; in May, work by Alene Strausberg. For further information contact the Alliance at 10 Cambridge Terrace Mews, London NW1. (01-935 1841). Open daily from 11am.

how to use the diaphragm

How It's Used

The spring ringed diaphragm or cap is a soft rubber dome with a flexible rim which fits over your cervix. One end is tucked behind the shelf in your vagina created by your pubic bone and the other fits into the posterior fornix, a small pocket behind the cervix. In exceptional cases, when women have weak vaginal muscles, cervical caps are provided — small caps which adhere by suction right over the cervix.

Fitting

Every woman who wants to use the diaphragm must be fitted by a doctor or at a family planning clinic. You will be given an internal examination to check what size you need and taught how to use the device.

Insertion

You'll be shown how to spread about two inches of spermicide on both sides of the diaphragm and a little round the edge (too much round the edge tends to make it slip). You can use spermicidal cream, gel or foam. If you use foam (Delfen) you have to apply about half an applicator full before you insert the cap, and put some on the cap itself. You'll be reminded not to insert the diaphragm more than two hours before intercourse as spermicides don't retain their strength.

To insert the diaphragm you squeeze it by pressing the rim between thumb and forefinger and put it into your vagina as if it was a tampon. It helps to squat, lie down or raise one leg.

Once you've got it in, you'll be told to check to see if it is in place by running your finger over the rubber dome to make sure you can feel your cervix beneath it, and to push the edges of the diaphragm up into the shelf of the pubic bone on the upper wall of the vagina.

The whole procedure is very easy once you know how and only takes a second or two. After the diaphragm is in place neither you nor your partner should be aware of it.

Plastic or metal insertors can be used. The diaphragm is hooked to notches on a rod, spermicide is applied

and you insert the rod into your vagina as far as it will go, then you twist the rod to release the diaphragm. Insertors are fine as long as women remember to check with their fingers that the diaphragm is properly in place.

A fresh application of spermicide is needed if a woman has intercourse more than once. Without removing the diaphragm, gel, cream or foam is applied with an applicator. Applicators which resemble plastic syringes are available from chemists. Alternatively you can use a spermicidal pessary pushing it up the vagina and preferably waiting three minutes for it to start melting.

Removal

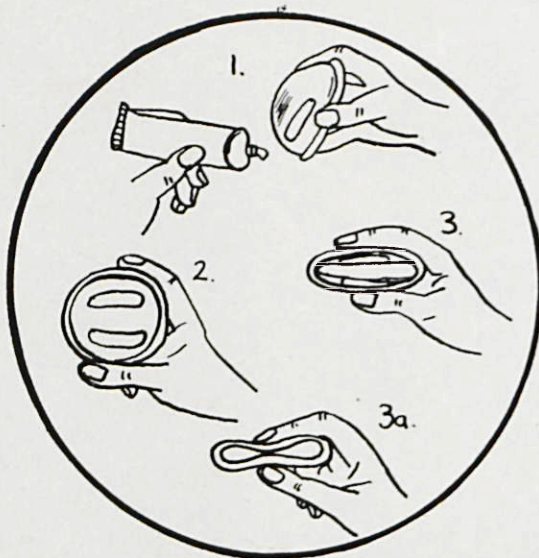
The diaphragm has to be left in place for at least six to eight hours after intercourse but should be removed within twenty-four hours. At the clinic you practice removing the diaphragm, placing your forefinger behind the front part of the rim and pulling the diaphragm down and out. Don't panic if suction holds it in place. Put your finger between the vaginal wall and the rim, pull down and out.

The diaphragm comes with an instruction leaflet on use and care. The manufacturers advise users to wash it well in warm soapy water and dust it with talcum powder, but talc contains chemicals which might damage you or the rubber so it's as well to use corn starch or baby powder.

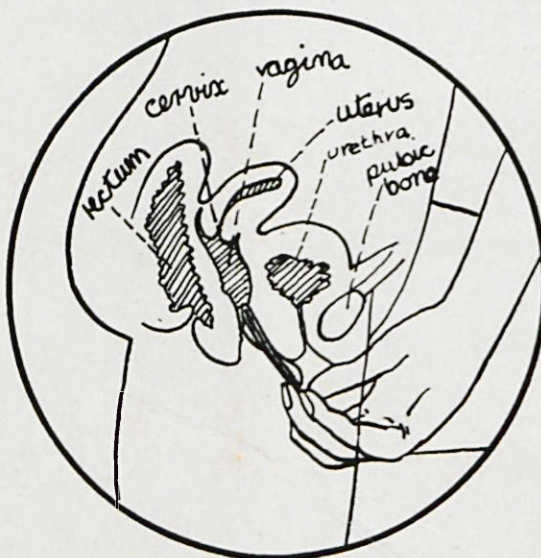
Check Up

Every so often it's worth holding your diaphragm up to the light or filling it with water to check for holes or thinning. And if the rim gets out of shape, press it back gently to its original form.

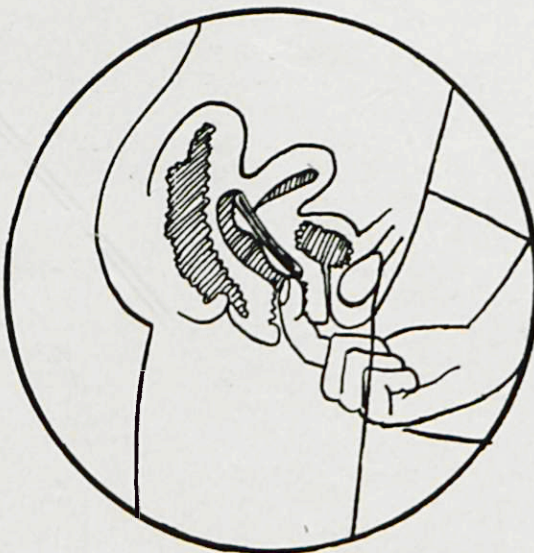
Every six months you are asked to go back to the clinic to see if the size is still correct, and diaphragms should be replaced once a year. You will anyway need to be refitted after your first intercourse if you are a virgin, and after childbirth, a miscarriage, an abortion, a pelvic operation or a weight change up or down of about ten pounds.



preparation



insertion



removal



Why are women turning back to the diaphragm? How reliable is it? Recent converts describe to Rozsika Parker the ways in which the diaphragm affects their sexuality and their relationships.

If the cap fits...

"I hate using the diaphragm. It robs me of spontaneity. It makes me feel self-conscious, over-responsible, messy."

That was the response I expected when I asked women to describe their reactions to returning to the diaphragm — a form of contraception they thought they had abandoned years ago, along with roll-ons, sanitary towels and stilettos. But though some said they resented the cap, others welcomed it back. It all seemed to depend on an individual's attitude towards her own body, towards her sexuality and on the state of her personal relationships.

Recent surveys have come out in favour of the diaphragm or cap. Professors Martin Vessy and Richard Doll at Oxford University in a long-term study of contraceptive methods found that the pregnancy rate for the cap was less than one quarter as high as was previously thought and the cap appeared to protect against cancer of the cervix. But that still leaves the pill as the most secure contraceptive; 0.14 percent of women on the pill in their study became pregnant in a year, compared to 2.4 percent with the diaphragm. But contraceptives carry risks other than unwanted

pregnancy. In 1976 Dr Christopher Tietze published the results of a statistical analysis of different methods of birth control based on a mass of recent evidence from the USA and Britain which revealed that women of all ages risk death least by using the diaphragm or condom backed up by early abortion if they become pregnant. However, the women I spoke to switched from the pill or the IUD not from fear of death but because their contraceptive was disrupting their lives.

Some found that the IUD gave them impossibly long pre-menstrual tension and heavy periods. Some abandoned the pill because they felt they had interfered with their body chemistry for long enough. Others simply couldn't find a pill that suited them. Andrea said, "I tried loads of different kinds but my body always swelled up and I felt terrible. Finally the woman at the clinic said, 'You know the answer for you—abstention,' and I decided that the time had come for me to demand a diaphragm." Her sister Lisa had a similar experience on the pill: "I felt sick all the time. Nobody at the clinic told me why. They'd just hand me another variety of pill."

"Insertion can provide a sense of self-assertion"

Lemons & beeswax

Three million women take the pill, according to the FPA, compared to only a quarter of a million who use the diaphragm. Andrea asked resentfully why she should be forced to use the oldest form of contraception on the market. Why wasn't more intensive research being done to develop a completely safe and satisfactory contraceptive?

The cap does have a long history. The spring ringed diaphragm, invented by a Dutch feminist in 1880, was the descendent of the half lemons, balls of opium, disks of beeswax, vinegar soaked sponges and rubber or metal cervical caps with which women had improvised for centuries.

In fact it was the very history of the diaphragm which endeared it to another recent convert I spoke to. She said she identifies with it because "it was invented to help free women, and distributed among women by women like Marie Stopes." She sees the pill, on the other hand, as "bound up with professionalisation and secrecy."

Failure factors

Getting pregnant is the major worry amongst diaphragm users: "There's that corner of doubt in your mind the whole time which you don't have with the pill." The pill is 99.9% reliable, the IUD 98% and cap and spermicide 97%, according to the FPA, but they add that reliability very much depends on whether or not you are a 'regular and practiced user'. Failure is usually due to:

- * Improper fit
- * Improper care
- * Inconsistent use
- * Diaphragm slipping because of expansion of the vagina during intercourse; too much spermicide on the rim making it slippery; the penis getting behind the diaphragm, said to happen more easily if the woman is on top.
- * Diaphragm ring bending due to constipation — a Harley Street gynaecologist commented that this caused the only failure he had come across.

The largest contemporary survey of users, carried out in New York from 1971-1973, showed that only 2% of more than 2,000 women had an accidental pregnancy. Failure rates were lowest among women under 18 years (1.9 per 100), and among women aged 35 and older there were no accidental pregnancies.

The researchers attributed the success of the diaphragm to the way in which women were taught to use it. Complete confidence with it depended on whether they had been thoroughly informed.

Clinic experiences

With such a simple technique it would seem almost impossible for women to come away from clinics clutching their diaphragms and a whole lot of unanswered questions. But even amongst the

small number of women I interviewed, there were some disturbing stories.

Take the case of Sally. She became pregnant while using the cap due entirely to the casual attitude of the university clinic in Sydney, Australia which provided her first diaphragm. They gave her an insertor and never told her to check with her finger to see that the diaphragm was in place. They neither supplied her with spermicide nor told her that the diaphragm should never be used without spermicidal cream or gel.

Rachel came away from a London clinic worrying which way up the device should be worn; dome up against the cervix or pointing down. Most clinic workers say 'dome upwards' but that you can decide which is most comfortable for you.

Alice had a more serious difficulty. Her retraverted womb makes it hard for her to remove her cap. In some women the top end of the womb is tilted so that there isn't a straight passage from the mouth of the vagina to the cervix. The clinic she attended gave Alice no specific advice about this and home on her own she found she couldn't get it out. "I went back to the clinic and poured out all my anxieties and problems. Eventually they became really clear, treating me like an idiot and saying, 'You are an anxious person aren't you.' It's only by being labelled an anxious person that you actually get any communication. They told me to lie in the bath if I had trouble removing it. Wrestling around in the bath with my legs up to the ceiling and using two fingers to hook it down, I can manage to get it out."

Margaret had a rather bizarre experience when her cap was fitted. She was taught how to insert it but the hurried, overworked nurse checked her anus to see if Margaret had put it in correctly. The nurse was so embarrassed by her error that she never completed the instructions. For three years Margaret was lucky then she got pregnant.

Of course most fitting sessions are efficient and uneventful. In the USA paramedical staff are being trained to fit diaphragms in women's health centres. Adele Clark writing in *Country Woman*, March 1976, describes the importance of being fitted by her "friendly paramedic Nancy" at a women's clinic. It shaped her attitude to the diaphragm: "We tried one kind and it wouldn't fit; we tried another and we both could get it in and out. Success. The word *we* is crucial. I was a participant, not a patient or a victim in this process of fitting my diaphragm, just as I am when I use it to prevent conception."

Body consciousness

I wondered whether a woman's attitude towards her body affected the extent to which the diaphragm is acceptable. Most said yes, it was an important factor; sometimes in perfectly obvious ways, other times in ways they couldn't fathom.

One or two said that attempts to use the diaphragm had been directly hampered by their inhibitions about touching themselves. But women who had masturbated since childhood had no such problems, and Jo said that touching herself "in order to put it in seemed like part of my history. I suppose your own history reflects the kind of contraceptive you'll find acceptable. I don't enjoy someone watching me put the cap in though and that can be tricky since I would never dream of going to the bathroom to do it — so to some extent it must represent a continuation of the privacy of my masturbation."

Diaphragm use seems also to be bound up with the self hatred that for so many women becomes focussed on their bodies. Mary tried to express this: "I see my body as an enemy, an alien area trying to do me down by not conforming to the fashionable shape. When I'm feeling particularly fat, I simply can't put in my diaphragm. I mean how can I prepare my body for pleasure when I hate it, let alone prepare it to provide pleasure for someone else."

Feminists often feel that the diaphragm enhances their sense of owning their own body — that it exists for *them* independently of bringing pride to their parents, pleasure to their lover or income to an advertising agency. Margaret commented, "I need to say my body's mine. The diaphragm is a physical symbol of my control of my own life." This theme is developed in Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*: "Pregnancy seemed like a tremendous abdication of control. Something growing inside you which would eventually usurp your life. I had been compulsively using the diaphragm for so long pregnancy could never be accidental for me."

Insertion can provide a sense of self-assertion which somehow can't be obtained by swallowing a pill. But the emphasis on control carries defensive overtones of fear, both a need for protection and a struggle for independence. Erica Jong continues, "The diaphragm has become a kind of fetish for me. A holy object, a barrier between my womb and me."

Lacking spontaneity

Most women, far from valuing the diaphragm as a last line of defence, complained that it inhibited their sexual spontaneity. Alice would like for once to be able to "fall into bed without thinking whether or not I want sex, whether or not he's satisfying me. I want to be bowled over." The diaphragm interferes with such fantasies and Alice's resentment gets directed towards her partner: "Spontaneity is allowed to him but not to me. I get strange feelings of anger about preparing myself for his needs. I always have to look after myself — he wouldn't bother. He didn't respond to my heavy hints about sheaths — he didn't like them. I feel men aren't concerned or interested in women's

"I can't even bring myself to show it to him"

worries about contraception."

But other women reported that their partners had no objections to sheaths. Some couples share responsibility for contraception by alternating cap and sheath, others use both together for extra security. Alice continued, "I remember getting angry the first time we slept together because in the morning we started fucking again and I suddenly remembered you have to put more cream in. He didn't remember, or didn't know, so I was the one who had to interrupt the love making to leap out of bed and be embarrassed. Then I couldn't get into it again — thought he'd find me repulsive or something."

Some women felt that complete openness was a solution. They incorporate the cap into love making, but Sally discovered a drawback: "You put it in front of him or he helps you put it in. You both get covered in goo and by then you are so bored with the whole process that all you want to do is go to sleep."

Not everyone minds the diaphragm's inconvenience. For Jo, the check on Spontaneity isn't a problem. Comparing the pill and the diaphragm she found the pill "coercive. It was developed to enable women to be sexual at any time, but to me it was like a statement that I had to be sexual at all times. The pill seemed less to do with not getting pregnant than with being sexually available."

Rosemary completely disagreed. Far from giving her permission to be sexually discriminating, she finds the diaphragm hopelessly limiting: "You have to decide in advance not just whether you are going to have sex, but what kind of sex you are going to have. Nobody else seems to have a problem with oral sex but I'm not prepared to inflict it on anybody — it tastes horrible. And Delfen made me ill it smelled so terrible." Margaret, however, "actually felt touched that he was prepared to swallow mouthfuls of the stuff for my sake."

It's worth experimenting with different creams or gels (which are more lubricating) to see which you find least off-putting. Some spermicides contain mercury. Mercury can be absorbed through the vaginal walls resulting in damage to the kidneys. So read the label of the spermicide you use, avoid those containing phenyl mercuric acetate (PMA), and stick to those that don't, Ortho Gynol Jelly, Ortho Cream, Rames Jelly and Delfen cream and gel.

None of the spermicides are delightful and women say that we should demand better tasting spermicides. But manufacturers would probably respond with stereotypically rose scented or apple blossom products.

On the subject of manufacturers, Sarah Calvert suggests in the New Zealand magazine *Broadsheet* No. 40 that "A lot of preconceptions about the diaphragm (it's messy . . . it's a hassle . . . it's always a failure) are tied to the campaigns by drug companies and others to promote 'easy' contraception. Easy

contraception does not exist."

Nevertheless, the basic inconvenience of the diaphragm is inescapable, though *MS magazine* Vol IV No 2 does quote studies showing that reapplication of spermicide and the 'rule' about not putting the diaphragm in more than two hours ahead of time are not necessary as spermicides retain their strength for 24 hours regardless of the number of ejaculations. But until the debate is resolved it seems wisest to follow traditional directions.

Lisa suggested lessening the practical inconvenience by leaving an applicator full of spermicide beside your bed at night or keeping your diaphragm in your bag with a generous supply of tissues. And she pointed out that the diaphragm lessens one specific inconvenience — making love with a period.

Taking initiative

The cap made some women feel furtive, and they behaved accordingly: "I can't even bring myself to show him what it looks like," said Sue, afraid that its functional, clinical character might put off her partner. Mary had similar anxieties with ironic results that left her outraged: "I groped my way back to bed from the bathroom with damp hands and cold feet only to find him rolled over against the wall, complaining, 'It turns me right off when a woman sneaks off to the bathroom to get ready.'"

Jo, on the other hand, found that the practical routine of diaphragm use helped to dispel a strong sense of sexual guilt. She felt that "the cleaning ritual, particularly in a shared living situation, had a very good effect on me. It went some way towards undermining the association of sexual feelings with dirt and mystery. I think this has something to do with the diaphragm being visible and tangible."

Margaret too sees advantages in the practical routine demanded by the cap. "It means I have to make a conscious decision as to whether or not I want to make love. It makes me feel I control my sexuality."

Alice is dubious about such decision making power. Rather than enabling her to express her own needs and desires, having to decide about the cap creates all kinds of fears and conflicts. She admits she wants "to abdicate from making decisions about whether I want sex or not — it's too loaded. I don't want to say 'no, I'm not sexual today' because it might turn out not to be true, and it's risky — you might get rejected for hurting his feelings. Nor do I want to say 'Yes, I definitely do feel sexual.' I might then be making a demand to be satisfied, taking a very risky initiative. The decision to put in the cap or not comes to symbolise these conflicts."

Similarly, though Sally has intellectually rejected women's role as the passive person who waits to be asked, emotionally she's immobilised at the prospect of taking the initiative: "If you reach for

your cap it's almost like saying 'we are going to fuck tonight' and I find that a pressure."

Jane felt much the same. The cap makes her increasingly aware of the chasm between men and women that rigid sex roles create. "I find it really difficult even to take my diaphragm with me when I go to see him. He lacks sexual confidence to the extent that he's immediately threatened if he thinks I'm being sexually demanding."

Some cap users say these difficulties can be overcome if it's inserted at night automatically "like cleaning your teeth". Then the cap gets divorced from sexuality. I heard of one woman who kept her cap in all the time, removing it every 24 hours to clean it.

Most women agreed that the diaphragm is easier to use within a long term relationship but added that obviously a lot depended on the quality of the relationship. One woman said resentfully that her husband checked to see if she had taken it with her when she went away. Another became convinced that her husband was about to prick holes in her cap. "When sex goes sour," Mary said, "the resentment you feel towards your partner is projected onto your cap." And Alice, looking back to her marriage, said that the diaphragm made her confront the fact she no longer enjoyed sex with her husband. "When you're on the pill it's easier to have sex than not."

Getting pregnant

All the women's feelings about their cap were shaped by whether or not they wanted children. "On the pill," Rosemary commented, "I experienced sexuality as completely divorced from any thoughts of contraception or reproduction. The diaphragm forced me to think about contraception and therefore about whether or not I wanted a baby."

Pregnancy fears often dominate the sexuality of diaphragm users and the discovery of her lesbianism can represent a woman's first spontaneous experience. "Making love with women," Jo says, "undercuts that memory of my mother telling me not to get pregnant. It was a real delight to be sexual without a contraceptive, a kind of rebellion. Heterosexual sex invokes a lot of emotion about the family which can be hard to deal with. That's one of the reasons why lesbianism has been such a sexual release for me."

The diaphragm is not 100% effective as a contraceptive. Most of the women quoted here returned to it because an entirely safe, and satisfactory contraceptive hasn't yet been invented and maybe never will be. They've pointed out that the diaphragm demands a sense of responsibility about your body and whether or not to have children. But restrictive abortion laws deny us that responsibility for our own bodies. If we are to use the diaphragm, and it seems many of us must, we have to have free, easily obtainable abortion on demand. □

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